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We, the undersigned, hereby certify that we have read and recommend to the General Faculty Council for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFESSION IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, submitted by Arthur Kloepper, B.A., B.S.W., in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Divinity.



THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFESSION  
IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to The General Faculty Council  
Committee on Bachelor of Divinity Degrees  
In Candidacy For The Degree  
Bachelor Of Divinity

BY

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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## A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

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A. K.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PENITENTIAL SYSTEM FROM JESUS TO THE REFORMATION	1
II	CONFESSION IN LUTHERANISM (REPRESENTATIVE OF PROTESTANTISM AS A WHOLE)	26
III	CONFESSION IN ROMAN CATHOLICISM FROM THE COUNCIL OF TRENT TO THE PRESENT DAY	46
IV	PASTORAL COUNSELING OR PSYCHOTHERAPY: THE PROTESTANT ANSWER TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CONFESSIONAL. COUNSELING TECHNIQUES AND CURRENT PRACTICES	68
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	



## CHAPTER I

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PENITENTIAL SYSTEM

#### FROM JESUS TO THE REFORMATION

Religious leaders have always been consulted for help in personal matters--advice, assurance, amnesty, counsel, comfort and confession. We have no actual writing by Christ himself and although we have only about fifty days of his active ministry recorded in the New Testament we see him approached by most human needs and problems. With unique insight into individuals, unparalleled interest in persons, and unmatched intuition into people Jesus felt that one of the main factors in his mission was to relieve human misery and suffering, and to release people from hindrances and from that which prevents growth and advance. There was an identification with the people he encountered and he sought to relieve suffering in any form whether it was physical, mental or spiritual.

His ideas and plans had infinite proportions and although he came to set up a spiritual kingdom he never neglected, nor lost sight of, the value of dealing with people individually. At times it appeared to be his only concern. Even when he spoke to assembled people themselves he speaks as to individuals: "He that has ears to hear let him hear." There



was much he wanted to accomplish, but he was never too busy to help face the problems of one individual soul. The synoptic Gospels show us a great deal of his teaching is spoken in dialogue as though he preferred this personal and conversational method.

Christ never seemed impatient or intolerant; disgusted or disgruntled; offended or offensive. Inherent in all his dealings were patience and courage, and no matter how deep was his disappointment he kept to the fore the person's potential. With exceptional accuracy he saw the person's difficulty and demanded he face it realistically. The spirit of his approach was ideal--not condemnation but understanding--not upbraiding but enlightenment--in all aspects it was constructive and creative.

In the matter of healing it is an attested historical fact that Christ healed. Christ, as a living product of his times, is described as driving out demons. (This is the language his contemporaries understood.) For example in Mark 5:19 and following we see his manner in a difficult situation. In search of rest and relaxation, he crossed the sea of Galilee. When the boat touched the shore he was approached by a "mad man" from the tombs. The crying out of the "mad man" and the cutting of himself with stones show the seriousness of the man's insanity. The disciples were astounded and afraid but Jesus remained calm and collected



and asked the man his name. The demons were evicted and the man was healed. Mark says, "he was clothed and in his right mind."

Christ's healing miracles have been a stumbling block to many: some attempting to eliminate them because of ignorance; others trying to emulate them because of egotism. We can, however, safely say that the tremendous power of Jesus' personality, the faith that the people had in him, and the psychological influence of the crowd which also believed in him, were accountable for the miracles. The discoveries of present day psychotherapy show us that most of these illnesses can be cured. The book Psychology and the Church informs us that most of the healing "miracles" of the New Testament are daily reproduced in mental hospitals.<sup>1</sup> James MacKinnon in his book The Historic Jesus gives this thought-provoking answer:

The will of a God-inspired personality, operating in faith on the patients and, as a rule, though not exclusively, with the patients' co-operating will, did achieve the cure of a variety of diseases. The modern study of psychotherapeutics or healing by mental and spiritual means, has incontestably gone far to vindicate the reality of these cures, which an older generation of critical writers, like Strauss and Renan, too readily assumed to be creations of myth or legend.<sup>2</sup>

In the cases of healing of the body there is frequent

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<sup>1</sup>Hadfield and Browne, Psychology and the Church, MacMillan, 1925, p. 90

<sup>2</sup>James MacKinnon, The Historic Jesus, Longmans Green, 1931, p. 351



association with the healing of the soul. Jesus is definitely influenced by the Hebrew concept of the unity of man. To the paralytic he says: "Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven." He then commands the man to take up his bed and go home.

With remarkable insight Jesus saw the main source of difficulty arising in human relationships. What Jesus saw in his day is what present day psychologists are emphasizing. For hatred he stressed love; for fear, faith; for bitterness, understanding; for guilt, confession and the assurance of forgiveness. He constantly taught that attitude and inner motive determined the outward act. "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45)

Proceeding from the subject of the New Testament to the author of much of it we come to the apostle Paul. His letters, especially the greetings, contain much commendation of individuals. In the letter to Philemon we see an adept person at work. In this letter he suggests a course of action without demanding that the reader follow it. Paul with his many insights into human personality was one with Jesus in seeing that the main source of difficulty arises in the realms of human relations. This is seen in Ephesians 4:25, 32; 5:2.



Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

...and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Paul's dealing with individuals is seen throughout his works. He was in need of spiritual support himself and he offered help whenever possible. He, too, understood the people and determined to meet them on common ground. He says: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." (1 Corinthians 9:22) His identification with those going through personal crises was almost unhealthy. "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to fall and I am not indignant." (2 Corinthians 11:29)

Martin Schlenk says Paul's greatness was because "he possessed the gift of the cure of souls (Seelsorge) in outstanding measure and employed the art with wonderful self mastery." The letters grew out of the practical problems he faced and were generally written when a personal visit was impossible. Dr. Goodspeed refers to them as "incidents" or "by-products" which grew out of his real work, which was personal contacts, his preaching and visiting.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Edgar Goodspeed, Christianity Goes to Press, MacMillan, 1938, pp. 17 ff



Although the early church had strong leadership in Paul and others it was faced with many adverse conditions. Slavery, vice, disregard for human life, especially women and children, added to the difficulties of the early church. With little organization, property or standing plus an itinerant ministry the church leaned heavily upon mutual helpfulness. The expectation of the imminent return of Jesus coloured all actions. Nevertheless Christianity brought much to the needy world: compassion for the multitudes; concern for the suffering of the individual; care for the sick and needy. The little book of James gave this definition of true religion: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." (James 1:27) We also see in this homiletic essay of the early second century mutual helpfulness: "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." (James 5:16) By the second century, the time of the Pastoral Epistles, deacons were common and were concerned with visiting, relieving the poor with practical assistance. Much of the work of the early church was centred and conceived, intellectually at least, in terms of the individual. Because of the belief in the imminent return of Christ emphasis was not focused on changing conditions or the structure of society. As the role of parish priest developed the duties also became more defined: he was to instruct the



people, carry on charitable work, visit the sick and take care of the problems of discipline, which was no easy task because the pagan courts were not used.

Because at least a minority adhered to the principle of love for one another and Christian charity the church gradually emerged as a firmly knit organization.

It was because they shared in these ways, and perpetuated by sharing, a new life in Christ, and effectively revealed it in their lives, that the Roman world failed to smother the Christian groups in its mass or crush them by its power, and that it finally turned to the Church for deliverance from its own political chaos.<sup>4</sup>

The Church teaches us in the Gospels and Epistles that dealing with individuals is never "merely a method--or even a method derived from a doctrine", or a task that can be relegated to a schedule of certain hours, but it involves our daily faith and acceptance of others in all activities and contacts.

Not all members of the Christian Koinonia took their privilege to share and to be sociable seriously. Their anti-social activities and anti-Christian behaviour necessitated discipline from the Church. Two Greek words became outstanding in Church discipline: Metanoia and Exomologesis. Metanoia is repentance which means a change of mind in the sense of a conversion or a complete turn about of moral direction.

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<sup>4</sup>John T. McNeill, A History of The Cure of Souls, Harper and Bros., 1951, p. 87



Exomologesis always appears in the New Testament in verbal forms. When it has "sins" for its object it has the simple meaning of a full confession. Those who came to John the Baptist for baptism were "baptized in the river Jordan confessing their sins" (exomologoumenoi) (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:9) A similar form is found in James when he says: "Confess your sins to one another" (James 5:16). Later the Latin fathers took the Greek noun exomologesis and it came to mean not only confession but confession and penalty. Then theologians began speaking of contrition, confession and satisfaction as the three parts of the penitential discipline and connected these with poenitentia which in the Vulgate means "contrite repentance".

In matters of church discipline the word exomologesis rose to primary importance. Around the middle of the second century confession was a part of the Sunday worship service. Unfortunately it is not known whether this was general confession or a personal confessing of one to the other. In the Didache it is recorded: "In Church thou shalt confess thy transgressions, and thou shalt not betake thyself to prayer with an evil conscience....On the Lord's day gather yourselves together and give thanks, having first confessed your transgressions".<sup>5</sup>

Tertullian, who permitted one repentance after baptism<sup>6</sup> but who didn't include the major sins of idolatry, unchastity and homicide in this repentance, says in his book On Repentance:

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<sup>5</sup>Didache (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) approximately 150 A.D., Didache IV, 14, XIV, 1.



"the discipline of the prostration and humiliation of a man, requiring a behaviour conducive to mercy". He contends that as confession is made repentance arises. The penitent garbed in sackcloth and ashes mourns over his sin, confesses before men and urges the brethren to intercede for him. Tertullian alarmed by the lax attitude toward confession and public exposure asks: "Is it better to be damned in secret than to be absolved in public?"

Differences arose in judgments about repentance in the West as well as in the East. Clement of Alexandria admits one post-baptismal repentance and allows it even for those guilty of the greater sins provided they were not deliberate acts. Origen and Tertullian would not admit idolaters and adulterers to penance; however, Origen is not always so narrow and legalistic.

During the persecution of Emperor Decius Cyprian did not strictly follow the traditional methods. He allowed the immediate restoration of the dying. Later those who from the first "backsliding" lamented their weakness were allowed in "under compulsion of necessity". Cyprian never turned away any whose consciences drove them to repentance. His action was instrumental in setting the example for moderation in the matter of Church discipline. The repetition of the exomologesis

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<sup>6</sup>Pastor of Hermas, Commandments IV, I, III and also Hebrews 6:4 (R.S.V.)



was not authorized by any third century Father of the Church. St. Ambrose of Milan, who died in 397 A.D., upheld the theory "one baptism, one penance" and in the West this was followed to the latter part of the sixth century. In a sermon of Caesarius of Arles he cautiously approves a second act of penitence. In 589 a Spanish Council strongly advocated the earlier unyielding standard of "one baptism, one penance".

One of the outstanding changes in Church discipline was the gradual acceptance, leading finally to the requirement, of the frequent penance which had long been vehemently rejected. With confession and penance obligatory, plus the fact of a more detailed catalogue of sins requiring confession, the penitential discipline became more important to both clergy and laity. The requirement of submission by the penitent to open shame and his public appeal to the leaders and fellow members of the Church was considered by Ambrose, Origen and Tertullian as the most dreaded aspect of penance.

There is considerable confusion regarding dates and persons in the initial attempts at instituting private confession and penance. It is most likely that in early monasticism the practice of private confession came into use. Paulinus in his book Life of St. Ambrose says that Ambrose wept with the penitents when they confessed their sins to him, and "never revealed to any but the Lord" what had been told him. St. Basil of Caesarea in his Longer Rule says no



one should hide, or speak carelessly of any sin of his soul, but confess it to "trustworthy brethren", who know how to direct the weak. The head of the monastery appointed certain monks for this task. It is noteworthy that in other of his writings St. Basil encourages public penance.

The writings of St. Augustine that are primarily concerned with confession and penance have been thoroughly examined by scholars and there is no evidence of private penance with absolution. Various claims have been made by Roman Catholic writers but these have been successfully refuted.

St. Gregory, Bishop of Neo-Caearea in Pontus, shows us a third century plan for penitents before they are restored to full and complete communion. Firstly, the "weepers" remain outside the entrance of the church pleading with the faithful to pray for them. The next step are the "hearers" and they are given access to the narthex. The "kneelers" are permitted to kneel within the nave of the church with the standing congregation. Finally there are the "co-standers" who partake in the worship service but are not allowed to take communion. The "mourners" state has all the features of exomologesis that many of the Church Fathers dreaded. In certain canons the "mourners" were referred to as "storm-harried" because they were victims of the weather as they stood outside asking for the prayers of the worshippers.



The first universal persecution of Christians took place under Emperor Decius (249-251). His aim was to compel Christians by torture, imprisonment or fear to sacrifice to the old gods. He did not stop with torture but often took lives. Origen was severely tortured and Bishop Fabian of Rome and Bishop Babylas of Antioch were martyrs. Many Christians "lapsed" as a result of the persecution. The matter of the treatment of the "lapsed" caused a long schism in Rome. After a lapse of persecution Gallus (251-253) successor to Decius renewed it. Valerian, (253-260) successor to Gallus renewed the persecution further with vicious force and cruelty. The next severe persecution was under Diocletian in 303.

In 314 the Council of Ancyra attempted to correct the confusion and discord that the persecutions had brought. The easily "apostatized" were to spend one year as hearers, three years as kneelers, and two years as co-standers. The famous Council of Nicea held in 325 was not as lax. They demanded two years among the hearers, seven among the kneelers, and two among the co-standers.

Various attempts were made by bishops and other individuals connected with the Church to establish codes to make the punishment in keeping with the sin. St. Basil of Caesarea in his three "canonical letters" (374-376) written to Amphilochius of Iconium has 83 canons on numerous sins. For some of the sins complete punishment is described, for others merely the period of exclusion.



In Constantinople in the latter half of the fourth century a "presbyter of penance" was established. His office was to receive confessions and relieve the bishop and clergy of this arduous and time-consuming task. Patriarch Nectarius ended the office because of a severe scandal that developed. As a result for some time formal penance was omitted and all parishioners were allowed to follow the dictates of their own conscience with regard to taking communion.

The graded system of punishment was confined to Asia Minor, Rome had none of it and the discipline there was public. Pope Leo the Great who reigned from 440 to 461 is credited with authorizing private confession but McNeill in his book A History of the Cure of Souls feels his leadership has been over-emphasized. Although the confession was private the penance was public. Pope Leo constantly emphasizes that one of the priestly functions was hearing confessions and meting out satisfactions.

In 459 Pope Leo wrote to the bishops of Campania, Samnium, and Picenum condemning the practice which had arisen of forcing penitents to publicly read a "libellus" (a detailed confession of sins). His strong feeling against the "libellus" can be summed up in two reasons: no apostolic sanction; and it may needlessly bring blame to Christians before their enemies and cause legal suits. The latter has special reference to secret offences. In reality he says



that public acknowledgement in detail of secret sins is not necessary. He feels it sufficient to make "a confession first offered to God then to the bishop". His reasoning and laxity had a practical purpose because he felt if the "libelli" were continued they would turn many against penance and cause them to avoid it altogether.

By the time of Gregory the Great who was pope from 590 to 604 penance had been severely neglected in Italy and he made a concerted effort to recover it by its ancient standards--public confession followed by public penance. He said repentance happens "when the resolute mind begins to let loose against itself words of abhorrence who aforetime from a feeling of shame it kept to itself." He emphasized that the public confession of secret sins was a wholesome exercise, nevertheless in his book Pastoral Care he gives the idea that private confession of lesser or minor sins followed by minor penances was becoming prevalent.

Penance began to be thought of not only in disciplinary terms but in sacramental terms. The disciplinary aspect helped to restore sinners to the benefits of Church membership; the sacramental aspect showed the supernatural grace cancelling the consequences of sin and returning the sinner to the favor of God. The words "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" and "whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and



whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"<sup>7</sup> which are adamantly attributed to Jesus conveyed authority to "bind and loose" in such a way that even heaven itself confirmed the action. The Church took these verses to mean that the Apostles were given divine authority, which gave powerful impetus to rising sacramentalism.

In the unfolding drama of penance we see that initially the whole Christian community was actively engaged in the administration of discipline and the receiving of penitents. The power to forgive sins, however, was believed given to the bishops who were considered heirs of the apostles. It is difficult to determine the thinking of Christianity in general regarding the penitential discipline in terms of grace sacramentally imparted. There was no clearly defined theology of the sacraments before Augustine and he never calls penance a sacrament. The seven sacraments were first drafted as an exclusive list in the twelfth century and established by the Council of Trent in 1545.

The penitential discipline of the Church Fathers in the Western Church was radically changed by the thirteenth century. Confession and penance were no longer public and unusual but private, conventional and common to all. Previously an offender was allowed one, at most two acts of penance; now it was Christian obligation to come to penance at least once a year.

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<sup>7</sup>John 20:23 and Matthew 16:19 respectively (R.S.V.)



For complete absolution in the early period public reconciliation generally followed the period of penance; now it was granted in private as one undertook the penance. Before the bishops had been the administrators; now the priests undertook the task.

A commanding historic role, from the sixth to the sixteenth century, was played by the Penitential Books which were widely used by parish priests. Written primarily by Welsh and Irish monks these books formed a long series. If we omit two sets of canons seemingly written by St. Patrick the oldest remaining pieces are connected with St. David and St. Gildas, sixth century leaders in the Welsh Church. The earliest work that can be considered a complete penitential book is attributed to St. Finnian of Clonard of the sixth century. Some of the features of St. Finnian's book are: the measuring out of the length of penance to parallel the sin; the principle of contraries for the correction of sinners. This idea of contraries was discussed by Cassian in his work Conferences and was presumably borrowed by Finnian. The principle of contraries is borrowed from the medical world where it ruled medical practice in the late classical period. Alexander of Tralles (525-605), the great medical genius of the period, says of contraries: "The duty of a physician is to cool what is hot, to warm what is cold, to dry what is moist, and to moisten what is dry."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>H. Haeser, Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Medizin, p. 321 ff.



The Church Fathers were familiar with medical thought but it is believed that Cassian influenced the Church to integrate the principle of contraries with the idea of penitential medicine. Finnian says of contraries: "But if a cleric is covetous, this is a great offense; covetousness is pronounced idolatry, but it can be corrected by liberality and alms. This is the penance for his offense, that he cure and correct contraries by contraries."<sup>9</sup>

St. Columban, writing about 600, says in his Penitential:

Diversity of guilt occasions diversity of penalty; for even the physicians of bodies prepare their medicines in various sorts. For they treat wounds in one way, fevers in another, swellings in another, bruises in another, festering sores in another, defective sight in another, fractures in another, burns in another. So therefore the spiritual physicians ought also to heal with various sorts of treatment the wounds, fevers, transgressions, sorrows, sicknesses, and infirmities of souls...the talkative person is to be sentenced to silence, the disturber to gentleness, the gluttonous to fasting, the sleepy fellow to watchfulness, the proud to imprisonment, the deserter to expulsion; everyone shall suffer suitable penalties according to what he deserves, that the righteous may live righteously.<sup>10</sup>

Some examples are:

If one of the laymen sheds blood in a quarrel or wounds or incapacitates his neighbor, he shall be compelled to make restitution to the extent of the injury. But if he has not wherewithal to make a

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<sup>9</sup>John T. McNeill and H. M. Gamer, Medieval Handbooks of Penance, Columbia University Press, 1938, No. 28, P. 92

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., No. 12, p. 251, The Penitential of Columban



settlement, he shall do his neighbor's work as long as the latter is sick, and he shall provide a physician, and after the injured man is well he shall do penance for forty days on bread and water.

If any layman gets drunk or eats or drinks to the point of vomiting, he shall do penance for a week on bread and water.<sup>11</sup>

The early penitential books of the Welsh and Irish became models for imitators in England and on the Continent. Information in the introduction to several documents show that they were in use in the latter part of the sixth century in Frankish lands, and in England in the late seventh century. Others show that they were in use in Italy in the eighth century and among the Spanish Visigoths about the beginning of the ninth century.

England never had the ancient public penance and Theodore of Tarsus, the main leader and organizer of the English Church, adopted and assimilated the essentials of the Celtic discipline. On the Continent only a memory of the ancient penance remained, being often advocated but seldom performed. The Celtic missionaries revived the "new type" penance but encountered difficulty from ecclesiastics. Certain councils tried to suppress the penitentials and suggested the revival of the ancient public system of penitentials. By the ninth century, under the Carolingian revival, scholars and bishops turned toward the Church's

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., The Penitential of Columban, No. 21, 22, p. 255



earlier traditions. The penitentials were coming into extensive use by priests who felt, in their performances, the need of a reference book. Also they rendered the priests certain independence from the bishop in handling penances. The penitentials, however, had little agreement with one another and no authority and finally led to serious abuses.

At the synod of Chalon-sur-Saone in 813 the penitentials were denounced and in 829 at Paris bishops were ordered to gather the books and burn them. The reason, as previously stated, was variations of the penalties described and the lack of ecclesiastical authority. Not many of the penitentials, however, were burned. Various attempts were made to revive public penance which was never, of course, completely abolished. Different practices and also different terminology grew up. Robert of Flamesbury in his thirteenth century Penitential defines solemn, public and private penance: "Solemn penance is enjoined only by a bishop, other public penance by a priest; private penance is that which is done privately every day in the presence of a priest."

Public penance was never fully established or uniform and it would have been virtually impossible to give it ecclesiastical authority. Even if it had received ecclesiastical authority it would have required complete modification and there still would have been the difficulty of imposing it on ninth century feudalism and those that ruled it. The most



feasible solution seemed to be a private treatment of sins and the most likely person to handle it was the local priest.

The Penitentials held their own in countries north of the Alps. In Italy the Council of Pavia in 850 re-established the older form of public reconciliation of penitents and limited its administration to the bishops. In 1051 Damian in his book The Book of Gemorrah wrote vigorously against the penitentials. All of Western Europe was affected by the penitentials from the sixth to the sixteenth century and penitentials were produced in England, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland and Spain and all had the "stamp of the early Celtic models".

Bishop Burchard of Worms, who was active in church reform and who was a distinguished ecclesiastic of the eleventh century, shows us his determination to make confession and penance as universal as possible in Book XIX of his Decretum:

This book is called "the Corrector" and "the Physician", since it contains ample corrections for bodies and medicines for souls and teaches every priest, even the uneducated, how he shall be able to bring help to each person, ordained or unordained; poor or rich; boy, youth, or mature man; decrepit, healthy, or infirm; of every age; and of both sexes.<sup>12</sup>

Provision was also made for penitents "as often as they came". The penitentials, for obvious reasons, became well classified and followed the scheme set forth by the Deadly Sins or of the

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<sup>12</sup>John T. McNeill and H. M. Gamer, Medieval Handbooks of Penance, "The Corrector of Burchard of Worms", Columbia University Press, 1938, p. 323.



Commandments. As the drama of penance unfolded further we find not only suggestions for penitents but also for those conducting the interviews. Initially in the interview there were questions on "the faith". Next the penitent was asked if he would forgive those who had sinned against him. Then the priest asked "in soft and gentle tones" the confessant to confess his individual sins. If there was reluctance on the part of the confessant the priest prompted with questions based on a penitential. This method of confession had a profound impact on the penitent. Once again we see, as in the times of Jesus, that the individual was of prime importance and the system was subservient to him.

With the twelfth century came some significant changes. About 1197 Odo who was Bishop of Paris established these regulations:

1. Priests are to apply greatest care and caution to confession, diligently searching out sins...

2. Priests shall be accessible in the Church and no one should hear confessions in secret places or without the church, except in great need or sickness.

3. The Priest shall not look at the face of the confessant, especially of a woman....

8. Having heard the confession the confessor shall ask the confessant if he is willing to refrain from every mortal sin; otherwise, indeed, he shall not absolve him nor impose a penance upon him.

9. In imposing slight penances priests shall take heed to themselves, for the nature of the penance ought to be according to the nature of the guilt and the capacity of the confessant.



14. In confession confessors shall take heed to themselves not to inquire the names of persons with whom confessants have sinned, but only the circumstances and nature of the sins.

15. He shall not dare to reveal anybody's confession to any persons, from anger or hatred, or even from fear of death, by sign or word, generally or specially, as in saying, "I know what kind of persons you are". And if he reveals it, he ought to be degraded without mercy.<sup>13</sup>

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 made confession and penance obligatory in the Western Church. Confession to a priest and a penance faithfully performed were requirements at least once a year as was also the sacrament of the Eucharist especially at Easter time. If this ruling was not followed entrance to the Church was barred and Christian burial was also denied. Confession was "to his own priest" and permission had to be obtained from his priest if another priest was preferred. The priest was under strict orders to keep the confession to himself or else he was not only deposed from priestly office but was also to be thrust into a strict monastery to do perpetual penance.

Although Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council instructed that confessions were to be "to his own priest" Gregory IX in 1227 allowed Dominicans and Franciscans the right to hear confessions and absolve, with or without consent

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John T. McNeill and H. M. Gamer, Medieval Handbooks of Penance, "From the Synodical Constitutions of Odo, Bishop of Paris", Columbia University Press, 1938, p. 412.



of the bishop. This caused considerable upset to local clergy. The issue was decided in favor of the "friars" and their popularity with the populace seems to have been helpful. This popularity was not easily won but it was inevitable with the Franciscans whose devotion revealed itself in a sincere appreciation of individuals and the value of human personality and dignity.

The friars gained entry to the universities of Paris and Oxford in the middle of the thirteenth century and they began writing on theological topics. Writers such as Bonaventura, Raymond of Penafort, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas worked at definitions for the parts of penance, as well as attempted exposition of the sacramental element in penance. Books of guidance, very different from the simple penitentials, and classified as confessors' compendiums appeared for the use of confessors. Raymond of Penafort wrote on the doctrine of the keys in relation to penance. He says there are two keys: one is the knowledge to distinguish the relative seriousness of sins; and the other is the power to bind and to loose. The authority of the priest had great importance to Raymond and he said that to do penance without the priest's decision is to frustrate the keys of the church. Aquinas divides penance into four parts, contrition, confession, satisfaction, and absolution. Contrition is defined as sincere sorrow for the offense committed against God and a sincere



determination not to repeat it. Aquinas holds that, as all sacraments convey grace, a penance begun in "attrition", which is sorrow for sin not motivated by love, or sorrow motivated by fear of punishment, may by sanctifying of infused grace become real contrition. Confession must be made at least once a year and must be made to the priest as the physician of the soul and must include all "deadly" sins--a list which was now quite lengthy. In the matter of satisfaction, though God in his mercy forgives the eternal punishment of the penitent, as a consequence of sin various temporal penalties remain. These penalties satisfy the sinner's offense committed against God so far as it is in his power to do so. These "fruits of repentance" help also to avoid sin in the future. It is the duty of the priest to impose these satisfactions, which, if necessary will be finished in purgatory. When the priest, as God's agent, saw serious sorrow for sin, heard what appeared an honest confession, and saw evidence of a willingness to give satisfaction he pronounced absolution. Here can be seen clearly the measure of control that the priesthood had over the laity.

Throughout this period the place of confession was in the open Church where confessor and counselor could be seen but not heard. The presence of others was often considered a safety feature, especially if the confessor was a woman. In any system of secret relationships such as the confessions



afforded there was bound to be some measure of abuse. These abuses, however, were not the determining factor in the deterioration of the sacramental discipline. Another enemy, far worse, began to rear its ugly head--the practice of Indulgences.

As the Church was a koinonia of believers, having most things in common, it seemed logical that they should share the combined merits of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints. The treasury of merits was under the direction of Peter and his successors. The remissions of penalty for confessed sins were granted from the treasury of merit with one provision--providing the sinner had the means to pay for it. The abuses that resulted are self-evident and innumerable and "completed the destruction of the ancient penitential system". The system became so corrupt that it required the greatest schism of Christianity--the Reformation--to correct its abuses.



## CHAPTER II

### CONFESSION IN LUTHERANISM

#### (REPRESENTATIVE OF PROTESTANTISM AS A WHOLE)

In looking at Lutheranism and their conception of confession it is necessary to look briefly at Martin Luther and his life, because without doubt, he is the outstanding individual of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was the product of Roman Catholic Christianity of the Middle Ages. His home life was religious, but not to extremes, and Luther grew up "to fear God, to believe in the reality of heaven, hell, angels, saints, the Devil and demons." He stood in terror of Christ as judge and he believed in the efficacy of the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the Apostles, and the saints. After preparatory school in Mansfeld, Magdeburg and Eisenach, Luther entered the University of Erfurt in 1501. His interest here lay mainly in nominalistic scholastic philosophy (Occam).

At the age of twenty-one after completing his Master of Arts degree Luther started to study law. His law studies were shortlived. While out walking on an oppressively hot day he was struck by a bolt of lightning and fearing death he called on St. Anne for aid and made a vow to become a monk. With Luther's fear of death and hell and the lightning striking



him as it did it was natural for him to make such a vow. It was commonly believed that the monastic life was the road whereby hell could be avoided and heaven could be surely won.

Luther chose the Augustinian order which insisted on rigorous discipline and under the command of Staupitz, then Vicar General of Saxony for the Augustinians, he studied theology. In May 1507 he was ordained a priest. Luther had extreme difficulty in performing the mass because he was terrorized by the thought that he as a sinner was addressing the living and true God. In later months he mortified his body by extreme fasting, prayers and vigils beyond the demands of his rigorous order. He went to confession daily and often for hours at a time, but inward peace eluded him.

In 1510 Luther was privileged to go to Rome on business for his order but even this did not bring the peace for which he had been earnestly searching. The light broke gradually as Luther read Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas. He was appointed to teach theology at Wittenburg University. While lecturing at Wittenburg he did extensive study and was honoured with a Doctor of Theology degree. A great source of inspiration and help was his confessor and spiritual guide Staupitz.

In 1515 as Luther lectured on Paul's Letter to the Romans the bright light of day struck as he read in Romans 1:17 "the just shall live by faith". To Luther this faith



was "grateful whole-hearted response of one's entire being to the love of God". Luther then concluded that this transforming trust was not, as he had previously thought, a work in which a man had a part, but it was wholly the gift of God.

Luther still needed the conviction of certainty of his own personal salvation. Like Augustine he had forcibly denied that such an experience could be a reality. He continued working on Romans till the latter part of 1516 when the conviction became certainty. It was "good news", filling his soul with joy, peace and an absolute dependence and trust in God.

Luther had not as yet worked out a new theological system. He had a deep, vital consciousness of God's forgiveness but his experience was not in line with the current theories of salvation in which penances, satisfactions and indulgences had a prominent part.

The theory and practice of indulgences, briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, at first seem to have been of a limited kind. They were the remission of some of the prescribed works of penance in return for some other act, such as a gift to a monastery or a church. Further it was believed that if the "temporal" penalties for sin were not met in this life, they would be required after death, in purgatory, before the soul was cleansed from its sin and was capable of the "beatific vision of God". In the eleventh century the custom gradually emerged of granting plenary indulgences, which is, remission of



all the temporal penalties for sins. True repentance was still a prerequisite to forgiveness, but the Church claimed the power to remit the temporal penalties. This was done by local bishops and Popes. One of the early instances of plenary indulgence was the granting of it by Pope Urban II to those who enlisted in the First Crusade. Later, plenary indulgence was gradually extended to those who by monetary gifts enabled others to go on a crusade or who performed some other specified good work.

To support the practice of indulgences Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas, elaborated the principle of the treasury of the Church. This treasury is a purely legalistic, quantitative system totally dependent upon good works. They said that the apostles and saints had done much more than they needed to assure themselves of heaven and had thereby added to a surplus of merit already accumulated by what Christ had done. Further it was held that the Church had been granted the power to transfer some of it to reduce or cancel the good works required of penitent sinners in satisfaction for their offenses. Pope Clement VI in 1343 gave official endorsement to the principle.

Some theologians, although accepting the theory that the Church could remit penalties in this life, were doubtful that indulgences could accomplish more for the souls now in purgatory than the prayers that the penalties in that place might be lightened. Others held that indulgences granted by Popes and



bishops were effective not only in this life but also in purgatory. In the thirteenth century the belief spread that one person could obtain an indulgence for another, and that the living might even obtain indulgences for the souls in purgatory.

In Luther's day the most degraded sale of indulgences became rampant. Pope Leo X, who was interested in raising funds to build a new St. Peter's in Rome, granted to Albert of Mainz the privilege of dispensing an indulgence in his territories for eight years. Albert to gain this favor had to give Pope Leo ten thousand ducats and also promise to pay him one half of all monies collected. These indulgences were not actually offered in Luther's parish because the Church could not introduce an indulgence without first getting the consent of the civil authorities. Frederick the Wise would not grant such a thing because he did not want encroachment upon the indulgence of All Saints at Wittenberg. The vendors did not enter Saxony, but they came sufficiently close so that some of Luther's parishioners could go over the border and buy the amazing indulgences. The instructions accompanying the sale indicated that a plenary indulgence had been issued by His Holiness Pope Leo X to defray expenses for building the "new St. Peter's Church" in Rome. Those who purchased indulgences would enjoy plenary and perfect remission of all sins. Further they would be restored to the state of innocency which they enjoyed in baptism and would be relieved of all the pains of purgatory. Also those who were



securing indulgences on behalf of the dead already in purgatory need not themselves be contrite and confess their sins.

The proclamation of this indulgence was given to the Dominican priest Tetzel, who was an experienced vendor. When he reached a town there was a solemn procession of dignitaries preceded by a cross with the papal arms. Next came the pope's bull of indulgence borne on a gold-embroidered velvet cushion. When the cross was solemnly and securely planted in the market place the sermon began by Tetzel exhorting all to buy indulgences for themselves as well as their dead in purgatory.

All this was too much for Luther. On the Eve of All Saint's Day Luther nailed on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg his Ninety-five theses. (Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences). He also sent a letter to Albert of Mainz asking that he withdraw the instructions of plenary remission and included a copy of the ninety-five theses.

The first four propositions concern themselves with penance:

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said Poenitentiam agite(Matthew 4:17, English, "repent"; German, Busse tun), willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.
3. Yet it means not inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work divers mortifications of the flesh.



4. The penalty (of sin), therefore, continues so long as hatred of self continues; for this is the true inward repentance, and continues until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.<sup>14</sup>

In a letter Luther sent to Dr. Staupitz in 1518 we see his interpretation of these four primary propositions. Dr. Staupitz had previously told Luther that true repentance (poenitentia) must begin in the love of righteousness and the love of God, and that it was a lifelong matter. The Greek word Metanoieite (in the Vulgate it is Poenitentiam agite) was usually taken to mean "do penance" but Luther said that Metanoia meant "coming to one's senses" involving a change in heart and affections in response to the grace of God.

Poenitentia had suddenly been transformed from a word of harsh meaning to one of pleasantness. Further Luther said that the word should be regarded as including within it not only the change but also the "transforming agency of God's grace." The common explanation of penance which took poenitentiam agere (not the Greek original) to mean merely outward actions was rejected by Luther as false. His new interpretation indicated inner change.

His protests in the Ninety-five theses were not against true penance but against false substitution. The primary meaning of poenitentia as heartfelt penance had been lost in the shuffle of substitution and indulgences.

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<sup>14</sup>

C. M. Jacobs (Translator), Works of Martin Luther, The Philadelphia Edition, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia 1943, pp. 29, 30, Volume One.



Before Luther wrote this letter to Dr. Staupitz he had written a tract called "Resolutions of the Disputation on the Virtue of Indulgences". In this tract he voiced his objection to the "required recitation in the confessional of every offense" which he said was impossible. Luther who had spent many hours in the confessional certainly spoke with conviction and authority here. The tract also stresses the Pauline doctrine of regeneration by God's grace. As Luther continued to emphasize inner transformation the whole procedure in confession was opened to question. This resulted in the publication of "A Discussion of Confession" (Confitendi ratio). This document is the culmination of a series of tracts published by Luther after he posted the Ninety-five theses. The progress that he was making in dealing with the problems offered by the confessional is noticeable. The Roman Catholic standpoint of the middle ages indicated that the completeness of the absolution is proportioned to the exhaustiveness of the confession. This promoted the most self searching examination and the most exacting enumeration of the details of sins. Luther did not underestimate the confessional and the value of confession but stated that its value rested wholly on God's grace and His promises and not on the degree of details given.

In the Kurze Unterweisung wie man beichten soll (Short Instruction on making a confession) Luther advises that confession be made in general terms, covering sins both known and unknown.



If one would confess all mortal sins, it may be done in the following words: 'Yea, my whole life, and all that I do, act, speak, and think, is such as to be deadly and condemnable.' For if one regard himself as being without mortal sin, this is of all mortal sins the most mortal.<sup>15</sup>

Luther rightly realized the utter impossibility of ever fathoming the depths of corruption within man. In the Tessaradecas he says that it is God's great mercy that man is able to see but a very small portion of the sin within him, for if he saw it in its full extent, he would perish at the sight. Luther, who was experienced in the confessional both as a confessant and a priest, became progressively more vocal about the mechanical aspects of confession. He even went as far as to suggest partaking of the Eucharist without confession, "that a man may learn to trust in the mercy of God" rather than in his own painstaking perserverance.

In his tract "Babylonish Captivity of the Church" Luther continued to lash out at the malpractice of confession in the Roman Catholic church. He called the sacrament vain where faith in the promises and threats of God was not active. Matthew 18:18 "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," is regarded by Luther to be addressed to all Christians and that it is their privilege and duty to hear

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<sup>15</sup>"Ja, mein ganzes Leben, und alles, das ich thu, handel, red und gedenk, ist also gethan, das es todlich und vordammlich ist." These are almost the words of the public confessional prayer in the Kirchenbuch of the General Council of the Lutheran Church in America.



confessions and pronounce absolution. This is clarified further in Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In a sermon on the Lord's prayer given in the Wartburg in 1522 Luther again emphasizes the value of confession to a brother Christian but indicates it is not to be compulsory. Also he says that if faith is firm enough confession to God alone is adequate.

In Defense of All the Articles Wrongly Condemned in the Roman Bull which is a summary of the early part of the controversy on indulgences and confession Luther says that contrition, confession and satisfaction are not in the writings of the Fathers nor are they in Scripture. He also says that no one can make satisfaction to God for daily sins because all that is not of faith is sin. In summary he says some sins are known only to God and therefore cannot be confessed by us; the reliance in confession is not on the degree of detail of sins confessed, but on God's mercy; for absolution to be valid there must be belief; and confession to lay persons is valid, as is also their absolution.

In his "Sermon on Confession and the Sacrament" given in 1524, Luther opposes morbid self-introspection. He indicates that one need not look very deep to find sufficient to prompt the confession of utter helplessness and the putting of oneself without reservation upon God's mercy.



Bring to the confession only those sins that occur to thee, and say: I am so frail and fallen that I need consolation and good counsel. For the confession should be brief....No one, therefore, should be troubled, even though he have forgotten his sins. If they be forgotten, they are none the less forgiven. For what God considers, is not how thou hast confessed, but His Word and how thou hast believed.<sup>16</sup>

This shows the radical difference between the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran conception of confession. In Roman Catholicism confession is a part of penance, the middle of three important steps, "contrition", "confession", and "satisfaction", an absolute condition of the forgiveness of every sin. In the Roman confessional, sins are treated individually. Some are forgiven, while others are still to be forgiven. Every sin stands alone, and requires individual attention. No unconfessed sin is forgiven. A sin to be forgiven must be known and lamented, confessed in all its details to the priest, who, as a spiritual judge, indicates the amount of satisfaction to be given by the penitent to the degree of guilt of the sin, as judged from the facts before him. In this quantitative system the debt of sin must be painfully and precisely worked off, sin by sin. Everything is made to depend upon the fulness and completeness of the confession. The absolution becomes simply the stamp of approval that is placed upon the confession.<sup>17</sup>

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C. M. Jacobs (Translator) Works of Martin Luther, The Philadelphia Edition, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia 1943, p. 77, Volume 1.

<sup>17</sup>J. J. Schindel (Translator) Works of Martin Luther, The Philadelphia Edition, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia 1943, pp. 293, 312, Vol. 1.; A. T. W. Steinhäuser (Translator) Works of Martin Luther, The Philadelphia Edition, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia 1943, p. 245 ff. Vol. 2.



The Lutheran conception of confession centres upon the sinner as a person, rather than on his sins. Where the person is forgiven but one sin, all his sins are forgiven; where the least sin is retained, all sins are retained, and none forgiven, for "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" Romans 8:1. The value of the confession is not in the confession itself, but through this confession we turn to Jesus Christ and His promises.

To Luther there were three types of confession. One to God, in one's own heart, something which the true believer continually makes; a second to our neighbor when we have wronged him; a third to a Christian brother from whom we receive consolation and absolution as sent from God.

In 1529 Luther devised a paper on confession for simple folk. The paper is worthy of including because of its insights:

"EIN KURZE WEISE ZU BEICHTEN, FUER DIE EINFAELTIGEN,  
DEM PRIESTER"

1529

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"A SHORT METHOD OF CONFESSING TO THE PRIEST, FOR THE  
USE OF SIMPLE FOLK"

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This short Form of Confession, the Evangelical substitute for the Roman method for auricular confession, is appended to the Small Catechism, First Wittenberg Edition, 1529.

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Reverend, dear Sir: I beseech you, for God's sake, give me good counsel for the comfort of my soul.

What then do you desire?



Answer: I, miserable one, confess and lament to you before God that I am a sinful and weak creature. I do not keep God's commandments; I do not rightly believe the Gospel; I do nothing good; I cannot bear ill; especially I have committed...N.--...and this, (here the penitent enumerates in particular the sins which distress him) which burden my conscience. Therefore, I beseech you that in God's stead you will declare forgiveness to me and comfort me with God's Word.

#### Another Form of Confession.

I confess before God and you, that I am a miserable sinner and full of all sin, of unbelief, and of blasphemy. I also feel that God's Word is not bringing forth fruit in me. I hear it, but I do not receive it earnestly. I do not show the works of love toward my neighbor; I am incensed, full of hate and envy toward him. I am impatient, avaricious, and inclined to everything that is evil. Therefore my heart and conscience are heavy and I would gladly be freed of the sins. I plead, please strengthen my little faith and comfort my weak conscience by means of the Divine Word and promise.

Why dost thou desire to receive the Sacrament?

Because I desire to strengthen my soul with God's Word and tokens and to obtain grace.

But in this Office thou dost obtain forgiveness of sin.

And why not? But I want to add God's token also to the Word; and to seek God's Word frequently is much the better.<sup>18</sup>

To Luther confession was considered a voluntary action. Those who wished to come were not plagued with details and distinctions that had hitherto been urged. In speaking of venial and mortal sins he says that no doctor is so learned

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<sup>18</sup>P. Z. Strodach (Translator) Works of Martin Luther  
The Philadelphia Edition, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia 1943,  
pp. 215, 216, Vol. 6.



as to draw accurately the distinction between them. Although Luther relaxed certain mechanical aspects of confession he still insisted that there accompany every confession a good purpose to amend the life. In relaxing certain aspects Luther ruled out the violation of purely ecclesiastical matters from confession. Nothing is to be regarded as sin except that which is a violation of one of the Ten Commandments. This was done to indicate the priority of God's law as opposed to man-made laws and to help lessen morbid self-introspection.

The Lutheran confessions of faith mirror Luther's main points on confession and absolution. In the Augsburg Confession of 1530 three sections are given to these two important topics. They state that they continue to practice confession and absolution, generally in preparation for communion, but not asking for detailed numbering of all sins. Repentance has the elements of contrition and faith. The faith springs from the Gospel and the absolution and gives the assurance that the sins are forgiven. Gratian is quoted to strengthen the view that confession is a human law and not divine law: "Nevertheless because of the great benefit of absolution, and because it is otherwise useful to the conscience, confession is retained among us." Absolution is valued highly because of its importance in unifying personality.

Melanchthon supports the Lutheran position on confession in the "Apology for the Augsburg Confession". The value of



absolution is that Christians believe remission of sins to be granted because of Christ's sake. Further he says that most people in our churches use the sacraments, absolution, and partake of the Eucharist often in the year without fixed times being specified. Enumerating of sins is abandoned in order to avoid additional guilt. Faith is considered an active part of repentance and detailed questioning in confession is abolished. He states that Lutheran teaching in the doctrine of penance is "more healthful to consciences". Absolution, although spoken by men, carries the forgiveness of God through Christ. It is "as the voice of God remitting sins and consoling consciences". James 5:16 is regarded as mutual confession and not private recital of sins to a priest. The third element of Roman Catholic confession, namely satisfaction, is condemned. Biblical repentance has in it newness of life and is followed by good works.

There was some diversity in regard to the practice of Lutheran confession and counselling. "Kirchenordnung" by Bugenhagen recommends visitation of the sick only by request. The Swedish "Church Manual" by Olavus Petri contains an extensive form for the visitation of the sick. After reciting a prayer of confession the sick individual receives "cheer and comfort from the minister in this manner: Dear brother (sister) as you have now made your confession before God and me, I declare unto you (in accordance with God's command) the full forgiveness of your sins."<sup>19</sup> After words of comfort the Lord's Supper is given

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<sup>19</sup>Westberg, Granger E. Private Confession in the Lutheran Church, Augustana Quarterly, XXIV (1945), pp. 138-162.



followed by prayers for the restoration of the sick person. The closing exhortation is "Do not worry about anything but hold fast to Christ."

Handbooks for Pastors comprised a particular group of writings and brought back memories of the penitential handbooks of the Middle Ages. The earliest were "Sterbebuchlein" that is books for ministering to the dying. Bugenhagen, Regius, and Myconius were the outstanding writers.

Martin Butzer's On the True Cure of Souls which was published in 1538 was the most prominent piece of work of the time. Although generally associated with the Reformed Church in this work he calls himself a Lutheran. His whole treatment is based upon the authority of Scripture. Ezekiel 34:16 provides the scheme for his discussion of a fivefold ministry in the cure of souls.

I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the  
strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I  
will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong  
I will watch over; I will feed them in justice.

The fivefold ministry is: to draw to Christ those who are alienated; to lead back those who have been drawn away; to secure amendment of life in those who fall into sin; to strengthen weak and sickly Christians; to preserve Christians who are whole and strong, and urge them forward in all good.<sup>20</sup> In this work he supports the idea of a "Koinonia" of Christians

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<sup>20</sup> John T. McNeill, A History of The Cure of Souls,  
Harper and Brothers, p. 178



who are mutually interdependent in all facets of the spiritual life. He indicates, however, that the main task of "binding up the wounded" passed upon those ordained to the cure of souls. Further he feels that discipline in the Church was a requisite of health and he advocates disciplinary measures which were comparable to the early Church such as "public exposure, humiliation and repentance". He also advocates excommunication for those who persistently grievously sin.

Scholastic Lutheranism, although based on Scripture, became as dogmatic and rigid as the Roman Catholic dogmas it had initially violently opposed. Pure doctrine and the sacraments were emphasized as the necessary elements of the Christian life. The vital, living relationship between believer and God, which Luther had faithfully taught, had been replaced by a faith in pure doctrine which had to be accepted unconditionally. This "dead orthodoxy" plus the political disorder caused a serious decline in Lutheran church life in the seventeenth century. Church and state were often under the same authority which tended to be detrimental to both. The cure of souls deteriorated and became limited to visitation and a rather mechanical practice of private confession based on the catechism. The Beichtpfennig (confession fee) was paid to the pastor for these services.

Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705) and the rise of pietism caused a long needed resurgence of activity. Like Luther the



pietists combined attention to personal religion with strong emphasis upon communion. The priesthood of all believers, which had deteriorated in Lutheranism, was revived and Spener also urged his followers to a total commitment to Christ. While a pastor of a leading church in Frankfort he organized groups for Bible study and the cultivating of the religious life.

Spener, although himself within the framework of the Lutheran church, criticized the fallen state of Lutheran practice of private confession. In the larger churches it was a superficial and speedy form with upward to twenty people confessed in an hour. Spener saw the potentialities of proper confession but felt it could be readily overvalued. At one time he considered abolishing it but he was never able to complete it. In his book Pia Desideria he advocates that Christians have a pastor as father-confessor or an understanding Christian to whom they open their inmost beings.

Spener was instrumental in stimulating interest in the forgotten layman who was slipping under the foot of mechanics of the church. He revived the priesthood of all believers and stressed the mutual upbuilding of the members of the body of Christ.

Previous to the Age of Enlightenment private confession in Lutheranism was still markedly successful but as time went on the opponents and critics gradually won a victory. Because



of the factors of time and strength private confession passed out of use and strange as it may seem it did so first in the rural communities. By the nineteenth century it appeared to be a lost cause and the cultivation of social virtues replaced it.

A flame for private confession was kindled by Marheineke in 1814. In his book Aphorisms for the Renewing of Church Life he spoke of confession as "a conversation with God in the presence of the minister" and indicated it was necessary for a healthy church. Klaus Harms of Kiel also favored the revival of private confession. He advocated that universities train ministers and also that they qualify themselves in studying medical practice and relate it to troubles of the soul.

In America Lutheranism provides us with a varied picture. Henry Melchior Muhlenburg was influenced by pietism and on coming to America he tried to establish a firm church discipline. He privately examined and heard confessions of those wishing to partake in communion. In serious cases he urged public avowal of guilt before the altar in the sanctuary. Because of his training in Halle he used the psychological emphasis to advantage and had insights which were definitely progressive.

Wilhelm Walther, one of the founders of the Missouri Lutheran Synod, came to America in 1839. In Europe he had had contact with pietism but nevertheless was a strong supporter of orthodox Lutheranism. He wrote American Lutheran Pastoral Theology and heartily approved of the Lutheran method of private



confession and absolution. He was a staunch supporter of the seal of confession.

In conclusion Lutheranism was instrumental in revising the Roman Catholic confessional. Initially they retained a modified form of the confessional and they tried to put the focus on the individual rather than on the sin. They freed the penitent from compulsory confessions and also the detailed recital of all sins. Gradually the confessional lost its significance and became a mechanical and routine practice. The next step was disuse. Even while the confessional was in use and especially after it was neglected the priesthood of all believers was emphasized. Believers were urged to confess to one another and receive absolution from one another and be mutually interdependent in a spiritual sense. This emphasizing of the priesthood of all believers and their exhorting to mutual edification is the great contribution of Lutheranism to our field of study.



## CHAPTER III

### CONFESSION IN ROMAN CATHOLICISM

#### FROM THE COUNCIL OF TRENT TO THE PRESENT DAY

Under Pope Paul III who reigned from 1534 to 1549 the Roman Catholic Church started what is generally called the Counter-reformation. In the reforms that followed effort was made to rid the church of abuses that had developed rather than alter its basic principles.

The Council of Trent, the nineteenth ecumenical council by Roman Catholic enumeration, opened on December 13, 1545, and, although there were two interruptions, it continued through the reigns of five popes until December 4, 1563. Its primary purpose was to provide a Catholic reform and a counter-reform against the Reformers and to declare to the faithful the true catholic faith. Following the Decree on Justification, the Council of Trent set down a list of canons on the Church's teaching on the sacraments in general; for in the sacraments, justification either begins or is increased or is restored when lost by sin.

Luther had reduced the number of sacraments to two instead of seven.<sup>21</sup> Further the Augsburg Confession stated that

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<sup>21</sup>Hugh Thomson Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, The Westminster Press, 1953, p. 163; A. T. W. Steinhäuser (Translator) Works of Martin Luther, The Philadelphia Edition, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1943, pp. 245 ff., Vol. II. (These footnotes refer to Luther's provisional retaining of penance as a sacrament.)



the sacraments of extreme unction and confirmation were instituted by the apostles and not by Jesus Christ. Luther also taught that faith alone determines the efficacy of the sacraments whatever the intention of the minister or recipient.

The Council declared that sacraments of the New Law were instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord and that there are seven of them, namely, baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony. The sacraments were to be regarded as of varying worth and are necessary for salvation. The sacraments by virtue of being done (*ex opere operato*) confer grace from the rite itself, and three sacraments, namely, baptism, confirmation, and holy orders, put an indelible spiritual sign on the soul, "which renders their valid repetition impossible".

In the fourteenth session of the council on November 25, 1551, the doctrine on penance was set down in great detail because of the particularly violent attacks on this sacrament by the Reformers. Chapter one of the Council of Trent's doctrine on the sacrament of penance indicates the necessity and the institution of the sacrament of penance. If all the regenerated kept for all time the righteousness received in baptism, by God's grace and goodness, there would not have been any necessity of another sacrament than baptism for the remission of sins. But God, who is merciful and knows our weakness, prepared a remedy of life for those who, after baptism, have given themselves over



to the enslavement of sin and the power of the devil. The remedy is the sacrament of penance. Through this sacrament the benefit of Christ's death is given to those who have slipped into sin after baptism. At all times all men who were marked and stained by mortal (serious) sin have needed penance to obtain justice and grace. The Council also says:

It was equally necessary likewise for those who would ask to be purified by the sacrament of baptism so that they might cast off and correct their wickedness and show their detestation of so great an offense against God by their hatred of sin and by the true sorrow of their soul. Therefore the prophets say: 'Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities: and iniquity shall not be your ruin'. (Ezech. 18:30) And Our Lord also said: 'Unless you repent, you will all perish in the same manner.' (Luke 13:3)<sup>22</sup>

Peter also recommends penance to sinners who are preparing themselves for baptism, "Repent and be baptized every one of you". (Acts 2:38) Penance was not a sacrament before Christ's coming and it is not a sacrament for anyone who has not first been baptized. The sacrament of penance was instituted by our Lord, after his resurrection, when he said to his disciples: "Receive the Holy Spirit: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (John 20:22 ff) The Fathers of the Church have agreed that the reconciling of the faithful who have fallen after baptism was transmitted to the apostles and their rightful successors. The Novatians were denounced and condemned

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<sup>22</sup>John F. Clarkson, John H. Edwards, William J. Kelly, John J. Welch, The Church Teaches, Documents of the Church in English Translation, Herder Book Company, p. 305.



as heretics because they denied the power of remitting sins, and the Catholic Church condemns any who attack the institution of the sacrament by changing the words of our Lord and referring them to the preaching of God's word and the announcing of the gospel of Christ.

The second chapter of the Council of Trent's doctrine on the sacrament of penance shows the difference between the sacrament of penance and the sacrament of baptism. The canon declares:

If anyone, failing to distinguish between the sacraments, says that the sacrament of baptism as such is the sacrament of penance, as though they were not two distinct sacraments, and that for this reason penance is not correctly called "the second plank after shipwreck": let him be anathema.<sup>23</sup>

The sacrament of penance differs from the sacrament of baptism in many ways. Firstly, the matter and form that make up the essence of the sacrament are very different. Secondly, the priest who baptizes does not stand in judgment. The Church does not pass judgment on those who have not first entered her membership through the door of baptism. It is God's will that if a member of his body be defiled with sin after baptism they would not then be cleansed by receiving the sacrament of baptism again (the Roman Catholic Church will not allow valid baptism again for any reason); but that they would stand guilty before the tribunal of penance so that the judgment of the priests

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid. p. 314



might set them free. The sacrament of penance is not limited to one penance but is available as often as sinners turn to it in complete repentance. In the sacrament of baptism Christ is put on and the person becomes a new creature in him and receives full remission of all sins. By the sacrament of penance to come to this new life requires weeping and work, in keeping with the requirements of divine justice. The Fathers of the Church rightly spoke of penance as "a kind of difficult baptism". In conclusion, baptism is necessary for salvation for the unregenerate; the sacrament of penance is necessary for salvation for those who have fallen into sin after baptism.

Chapter three on the doctrine on the sacrament of penance indicates the parts and effects of penance. The Council teaches that the form of the sacrament of penance, which contains the power of the sacrament, is in these words of the priest: "I absolve you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." The Church has added prayers to the words of the priest; however, these added prayers do not pertain in any way to the essence of the form, and they are not necessary for administering the sacrament.

The parts of the sacrament of penance are contrition, confession, and satisfaction. These acts are demanded of the penitent for complete and perfect remission of sins. The canon explicitly states these three parts:

If anyone denies that, for the entire and perfect remission of sins there are three acts required of the penitent as the quasimatter of the sacrament of penance,



namely: contrition, confession, and satisfaction, which are called the three parts of penance; or if anyone says that there are only two parts to penance, namely the terrors aroused in a conscience as a consequence of its recognition of sin and the faith derived from the gospel or from absolution, by which each one believes that his personal sins are remitted through Christ: let him be anathema.<sup>24</sup>

The full effect of the sacrament of penance is reconciliation with God, which, to those who receive the sacrament with true devotion, is sometimes followed by peace of conscience.

Contrition is the focus of Chapter four in the Council of Trent's doctrine on the sacrament of penance. Contrition, which occupies the primary place among the acts of the penitent, is a deep sorrow and detestation for sin committed, with a firm resolve of sinning no more. Contrition has always been necessary in receiving forgiveness of sin. When a person has fallen into sin after baptism, contrition is a preparation for remission of sins, but it must be attended by trust in God's mercy plus a desire of completing the other conditions essential to receiving the sacrament in a right way. Contrition implies more than giving up sin and determining to lead a new life, but also hating one's past life, according to the words of Ezekiel 18:31: "Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed, and make to yourselves a new heart, and a new spirit." The following cries of the saints indicate a violent hatred of their past life. "Against thee alone have I sinned,

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<sup>24</sup>

Ibid. p. 315



and have done evil before thee" (Psalm 50:6 or in K.J.V. 51:4) "I am wearied with my sighs, every night my bed is drenched with my tears" (Psalm 6:7); "I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul."

Attrition is imperfect contrition and generally results either from looking at the malice of sin or the fear of an eternity in hell and its punishment. Although attrition cannot guide the sinner to justification without the sacrament of penance, nevertheless it inclines the penitent to implore God's grace in the sacrament of penance. For example the inhabitants of Nineveh profited from the fear which the preaching of Jonah engendered and inspired in them; they did penance and obtained mercy from the Lord. The canon on contrition declares:

If anyone says that the contrition which is engendered by the examination, consideration, and detestation of sins, as a person reviews all his years with a bitter heart, meditating on the seriousness of his sins, their number and heinousness, the loss of eternal happiness and the eternal damnation incurred, and so proposes to lead a better life, is not a true and very beneficial sorrow and does not prepare a person for the reception of grace, but that it makes a man a hypocrite and a greater sinner; and finally, that it is a forced sorrow, and not free and voluntary: let him be anathema.<sup>25</sup>

Chapter five of the Doctrine on the sacrament of penance is concerned with confession. It states that the Catholic Church has always maintained that integral confession of sins was appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and that by divine law confession is needed for all those who have

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid. p. 315



fallen into sin after their baptism. Scriptural references given are Luke 17:14; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9. The Lord Jesus Christ, at his ascension to heaven, left priests to be his representatives on earth, as rulers and judges to whose authority Christians are to present for judgment and advice all mortal sins to which they have succumbed. The priests, who hold the power of the keys, are to give the sentence of retention or forgiveness of the sins. The priests through lack of knowledge of the situation could not properly exercise judgment, nor could they be just in demanding penances, if the penitents confessed their sins only generally instead of numerically and specifically. The logical conclusion is that penitents must enumerate in confession all the mortal sins they are consciously aware of, even if they be secret and hidden sins. Venial sins, which do not exclude from God's grace and into which we fall frequently, may be mentioned to advantage. On the other hand these venial sins may be left unsaid without any sin, and atonement made for them in other ways. Mortal sins, even mortal sins of thought, however, which make men aliens to God, must be enumerated and the penitent must beg for God's forgiveness in a humble confession. When a penitent makes a sincere effort to confess all the sins they remember, they lay them all before the "divine Mercy" for forgiveness. Those who purposely hide some sins, do not present anything to be remitted by the "divine Goodness" through the



priest, "For if a sick man is ashamed to show the physician his wound, the physician cannot treat something he is ignorant of." The circumstances and the situation of the sin must also be mentioned in confession because if they are left out, the penitents are making an incomplete confession, and the priests as judges cannot exercise their authority properly. It is therefore unreasonable to say that these regulations were planned by men who lacked direction and had an over-abundance of time and that the only confession needed is a general one such as: "I have sinned against my brother."

It is further a grave error to say that such complete confession is not possible or to call it "a torture for consciences". What the Church demands is that the penitent examine himself thoroughly, looking into the dark corners of his conscience, and that confession be made of those sins brought to mind by this thorough examination. Other sins, which are not remembered after the careful examination of conscience, are considered as included in a general way in that same confession. For these sins we, with the prophet, pray: "From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord." (Psalm 18:13; or in K.J.V. 19:13) All the embarrassments, hardship and shame of confessing one's sins are dwarfed when one considers the advantages of release and forgiveness contained in the absolution that follows a good confession.



There are two canons on confession that are worthy of including:

If anyone says that, to obtain remission of sins in the sacrament of penance, it is not necessary according to divine law to confess each and every mortal sin that is remembered after proper and diligent examination, even secret sins, and sins against the last two commandments, and those circumstances which change the species of a sin; but says that such confession is only useful for instructing and consoling the penitent, and that it was formerly observed only for the purpose of imposing the canonical penance; or if anyone say that those who make an effort to confess all their sins wish to leave nothing to the forgiveness of the divine Mercy; or, finally, that it is not permissible to confess venial sins: let him be anathema.<sup>26</sup>

If anyone says that the confession of all sins, as the Church practices it, is impossible, and that it is a human tradition that the faithful ought to abolish; or if he denies that each and every one of Christ's faithful of both sexes is bound to confess once a year according to the regulation of the great Lateran Council, and says, consequently, that Christ's faithful should be discouraged from confessing during the Lenten season: let him be anathema.<sup>27</sup>

Chapter six deals with the important role that the minister plays in the sacrament of penance. The teachings promulgated by Martin Luther on the "priesthood of all believers" that is the giving of the office of the keys to all men, even those not bishops and priests, is strongly denounced as foreign to the truth of the gospel. Those who teach these false doctrines take the words of our Lord: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed also in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 316

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 316



heaven" (Matthew 18:18), and "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:23) as given to the faithful without any differences whatever being shown, and granting to all individuals the power of remitting sins.

The Council indicates that priests who are in a state of mortal sin still may perform the office of remitting sins as Christ's representative by the power of the Holy Spirit granted them at their ordination. In the absolution of a priest he is granting a gift that is not his own, however, it is not simply a ministry that announces the gospel or of simply declaring that the sins are remitted; but it is like a truly judicial act by which the sentence is uttered by the priest as a judge. The penitent is seriously mistaken if he thinks that by faith alone he is absolved in the sight of God. Faith without penance does not give remission of sin.

The canons concerned with the priesthood in the sacrament of penance are:

If anyone says that the sacramental absolution of the priest is not a judicial act, but is a simple ministry that consists in a pronouncement and declaration that the sins of the person confessing are remitted, provided only that he believes himself absolved, even if the priest gives absolution in jest and without a serious intention; or if anyone says that the confession of the penitent is not required so that the priest can absolve him: let him be anathema.<sup>28</sup>

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Ibid. p. 316



If anyone says that priests who are in the state of mortal sin do not have the power of binding and loosing; or that priests are not the only ministers of absolution, but that to each and everyone of Christ's faithful it was said: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matthew 18:18), and "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:23); and that in virtue of these words anyone can absolve sins--- public sins by a mere reprimand, if the person reprimanded acquiesces, secret sins by voluntary confession: let him be anathema.<sup>29</sup>

The reservation of cases is the concern of chapter seven on the doctrine of the sacrament of penance. The Council and also the holy Fathers felt that in the discipline of Christians the more heinous and grievous sins should be absolved by priests of higher authority rather than the ordinary or lesser priests. Therefore, because of the supreme power vested in them by the Church, the "sovereign pontiffs" could select for their own judgment the cases of extremely serious sins. Bishops, because of their position and authority, may do likewise in the areas of their jurisdiction. This reservation is generally exercised in cases which have a censure of excommunication connected with them. The reservation of cases is not upheld at the hour of death because it is feared that carrying out the reservation may result in someone not receiving absolution in time and thus ending in eternal damnation. The lesser priests are totally within their authority to absolve a

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<sup>29</sup>

Ibid. pp. 316, 317



penitent from all sins and censures at the hour of death. Any other time the priests, having no authority in reserved cases, should attempt to help the penitents accept the idea of appealing to the higher judges of the Church to receive the assurance of absolution.

The important issue of the necessity and benefit of satisfaction is the topic of concern in chapter eight. Satisfaction has always been strongly upheld by the Fathers of the Church. In accordance with divine mercy sins should not be forgiven without the penitent giving satisfaction. There is good possibility that if forgiveness be granted easily sins will be lightly regarded and the result will be falling into deadlier sins. Satisfaction undoubtedly deters from sin and helps the penitent to be more cautious and careful in the future. The effects of sins are nullified by acts of contrary virtues (see principle of contraries mentioned in chapter one) and have the effect of ridding the penitent of evil habits by developing new wholesome habits. The Catholic Church has always maintained that satisfaction is a sure way of warding off the punishment of God. In performing satisfaction for sins committed the penitent is made like his Saviour Jesus Christ who "has satisfied for our sins". All satisfaction is made through Jesus Christ because no penitent has the strength to do it alone.

A man has nothing in which he can take pride; but all our pride is in Christ, in whom we live, in whom we move, in whom we make satisfaction, bringing forth



fruits worthy of repentance, which have all their value from Christ, are offered to the Father by Christ, and are accepted by the Father through Christ.<sup>30</sup>

The priests of the Lord are to give penances in proportion to the kind of sins and also are to take into consideration the penitent and his capabilities. If the priest deals lightly with the matter of sin by imposing insufficient satisfaction they are in reality becoming partners in other men's sins. Priests are to keep in mind that the satisfaction has a double purpose: to encourage the new life; also to impose "reparatory punishment" for sins committed. No Catholic feels that any satisfaction he has done has lessened the value of the satisfaction of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The defining of the sacrament of penance by the Council of Trent in the Catholic Counter-reformation had the added effect of revitalizing the confessional. The Jesuits were active promoters of the confessional as well as taking a leading role in the developing of the casuistry of the confessional. Their work included instruction on many cases which were minutely described and compiled. Their casuistry developed into the "minima" on which absolution could be granted, and they were sharply criticized for lowering standards for the average Catholic. The Jesuits supported the trend to regard sin as a series of concrete acts rather than as a state of sin. This had the effect of minimizing the nature of sin. Sin was defined

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid. p. 313



as that which is committed with a complete knowledge of its sinfulness and a full consent of the will.

Although not the inventors of the method of probabalism the Jesuits become the principle exponents of it. Probabalism had the effect of undermining personal responsibility. It indicated that a man could choose the worst course if he could find adequate authority for it. The degradation was furthered by the idea of "mental reservation". This idea indicated that men were not obligated to give the whole truth under oath if they did it for ends that seemed good.

The founder of the Redemptorist Fathers, Neapolitan Alfonso de Liguori, was the great exponent of casuistry in the eighteenth century. The Redemptorist Fathers carried on some of the aspects of Jesuit casuistry when the latter were abolished. Liguori wrote in his Moral Theology that he thought of the confessor as "father, physician, teacher and judge". Primarily Liguori took a rigorist position but gradually he mellowed to the probabalist position. Later he supported the position known as "equiprobabalism". This position eases the conscience only when authorities are favourable or at least when there is equal representation on both sides of the question. He strongly advocated the teaching of casuistry to confessors especially considering the extensive laws and decrees in existence in the Church. He supported a high standard on the part of confessors stating that priests who hear confessions without



adequate knowledge put themselves in a state of damnation.

In The Apostolic Man Instructed a high standard is asserted and detailed direction for confessors is given. He says confession must be "vocal, secret, true and integral". He advocates prayer to the Virgin Mary as a remedial penance and is against yielding to penitent's demands in granting easy satisfactions.

Liguori's system regarding the confessor and confessional is widely accepted by modern Roman Catholics. In 1831 Pope Gregory XVI allowed all confessors to follow Liguori exclusively. Previously it had been accepted procedure to take advice from other authorities.

The book Contemporary Moral Theology, published in 1958, shows recent Roman Catholic thinking and interpretation regarding the confessional and the confessor. It shows modern probabilism and also Liguori's influence. The confessor in making a judgment of grave guilt must rely first of all on the testimony of the penitent's own conscience. God judges men on the basis of their conscious motives and decisions. Possibly the unconscious is playing a major role in the penitent's conduct, but the confessor is a poor judge of that. Some psychiatrists attribute considerable influence to the "dynamic unconscious" while others warn against making conclusions too rapidly to "psychoanalytical" explanations. Nevertheless the confessor must consider first of all the conscious information



given by the penitent, yet so many penitents are poor describers of their own personal experience. When searching the penitent's conscience the two following questions can be useful: "Did you realize fully it was a grave sin?" and "Could you have resisted?" Oft-times an answer in the affirmative does not conclusively indicate a mortal sin has been committed.

Certain criteria when present should lead the confessor to judge with consideration the question of mortal guilt in individual cases. The more of these criteria present indicate more reason for saying that there is no serious fault or sin.

Firstly, if there is a history of emotional illness and mental breakdown lenient action should be given. Also with penitents who are under psychiatric care there is good reason for doubting serious guilt.

Secondly, if there is a deeply ingrained habit which the penitent is earnestly attempting to overcome lenient judgment is advised. Addictive personalities are persons who easily form enslaving habits, either physiological or psychological, and should be dealt with in a lenient manner. These people are prone to most anything which gratifies the senses. Some people are susceptible to forming compulsive, repetitious patterns of behavior which can only rightfully be called pathological. The psychiatrist, not the priest, is the judge of pathological cases.

In the third place, sexual passion when completely aroused can be overpowering. At its height it precludes not



only guilt but any human act. If a person has resisted and refused consent to a point where passion is most intense he should be presumed not to be gravely responsible for what thereupon takes place.

Fourthly, the reducing and narrowing of consciousness to one all-absorbing object of desire shuts out an adequate appraisal of alternatives to that desire, and reduces psychological liberty past the point where mortal guilt is possible.

A fifth consideration is that an unexpected assault of passions hardly allows ample opportunity for adequate deliberation and therefore cannot be considered a mortal sin.

In the sixth place, senseless, momentary sensuous-satisfying, repetitions of the act of self-abuse within a limited time are signs of pathological impulse and indicative of reduced responsibility.

Seventhly, the expression of fantastic ideas during the difficulties of temptation, for example: "This is another person, not I, who is doing this," or "The natural law is different for me," or "I am dreaming that I am doing this," ....all these and similar irrational defenses indicate that the person is not himself and are arguments against serious fault.

Finally, and certainly of importance in helping the confessor make his judgment is knowledge of the state of the penitent's soul.



If a penitent is making serious efforts to lead a life pleasing to God; if he is sincerely trying to overcome this habit and avoid the individual acts; if he avoids the occasions that are avoidable, frequents the sacraments and is constant in prayer; and especially if on the individual occasions when temptation comes he does not yield except after a long struggle or a hard one--the confessor should be lenient in judging the case.<sup>31</sup>

A confessor to form a careful judgment about the state of the penitent's soul must take the time and trouble necessary to do so. If penitents are rushed through the confessional they may receive absolution, but the confessor fails in his office as "teacher, father, and physician, and, in these difficult cases, in his essential role of judge." Certain cases can be more effectively handled by the spiritual counselor outside the confessional. When the confessor has taken sufficient time and trouble to understand the penitent's case to make an honest judgment he should help the penitent know the state of his soul. The confessor should state the truth as it has come to him. Most people realize his judgment is human and therefore imperfect, but our Lord instituted the sacrament of penance in such a way that He makes use of human judgments in granting the grace of the sacrament to the soul of the sinner. The confessor should not only tell the penitent the truth about the state of his soul but should offer adequate explanations with the truth. To say: "You committed mortal sin"

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John C. Ford, and Gerald Kelly, Contemporary Moral Theology, Questions in Fundamental Moral Theology, The Newman Press, 1958, Vol. 1, p. 242.



is insufficient. The truth should be accompanied by kindly advice and earnest encouragement. The truth with adequate explanation will provide the penitent with a good basis to understand himself and help him in his restoration.

If the priest or confessor is convinced that the penitent before him has committed mortal sin he should tell the penitent and try to bring him to fervor in the Christian life by following the satisfaction that is given.

If the confessor has doubts about grave subjective guilt and believes it is probable that the penitent has not mortally sinned, again he should tell the penitent the truth as it has come to him. Such a statement, although not conclusive, will be encouraging to a penitent who has been sincerely trying his best. Also it will help him to keep trying when a lapse happens later on. Often penitents, after falling into sin once, conclude they have sinned mortally when this is very doubtful. They then give up all resistance and make no concerted effort to avoid additional falls before the next confession. It is the thinking that one may as well "be hung for a sheep as a lamb".

If the confessor is convinced that the penitent has not committed a mortal sin he should tell the penitent, but he should guard against "lulling" the penitent into a false sense of goodness. Because the acts committed were not gravely guilty this does not absolve the penitent from all responsibility for them.



When an emotionally sick penitent is in the confessional it is perfectly in order to tell him he is emotionally sick as long as you tell him that something can be done about his illness and that you will help him to do it. Further, it is in order to tell this type of penitent, many of whom are plagued with exaggerated feelings of neurotic guilt, that he is not mortally guilty when this is the truth that comes to you. It is also in order to explain to the penitent that he is suffering from "a more or less pathological obstacle to liberty" if you also tell him he should get rid of it and that you will do your utmost to help him rid himself of it.

In other words with this type of penitent, who is sincerely trying to please God, it is often very helpful to treat his problem, for practical purposes, as a psychological one rather than a moral one. In this way one may discover the psychological source of the difficulty. At least one may correct the habit even though failing to find the source. By reducing the disproportionate feelings of guilt and tension, and by dealing with the difficulty in the calm, objective light of scientific discussion, it is often possible to bring the penitent to a clearer understanding of himself and of his problem.<sup>32</sup>

The problem with certain individuals in the confessional is to try to discern whether their behaviour is motivated by conscious forces, which are under the domination of the will, or whether neurotic needs are demanding a course of action in which the will has little or no say at all. It is a momentous and baffling problem. The conclusion that is oft-times reached, and it is one which stays within the bounds of theological requirements as well as taking into consideration the new

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid. p. 245



knowledge we have as to emotional obstacles, is that confessors should judge more leniently than they have in the past in certain cases of human frailty. "Though man may be more reasonable than the psychiatrists believe, he is less so than the philosophers think."

The Roman Catholic conception of confession or the sacrament of penance was classically defined by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. The Roman Catholic view of confession has the advantage of centuries of experience and refinement previous to and after the Council of Trent. Under the guidance of a conscientious priest, the sacrament of penance makes divine grace meaningful without minimizing the individual's responsibility for his sin. At its best, the confessional is an excellent means for the "cure of souls", one whose benefits Protestantism has discarded far too easily. The friendly "chit-chat" with the minister at the church door or in his study is a most unsatisfactory substitute. Psychologically, too, private confession is healthy, allowing a person to "come clean" about his guilty feelings and to know since he has "come clean" he has the forgiveness of almighty God. One cannot over-estimate the therapeutic value of this.

The Roman Catholic confessional, at its worst, deteriorates into a demanding dictatorship with the pseudo-stamp of almighty God upon it. Under the direction of an ignorant or domineering priest the authority of the confessional can be used to peer into the profoundly personal aspect of lives and excite guilt over petty everyday events.



## CHAPTER IV

### PASTORAL COUNSELING OR PSYCHOTHERAPY

#### THE PROTESTANT ANSWER TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CONFESSIONAL COUNSELING TECHNIQUES AND CURRENT PRACTICES

Thus far we have looked at the development of confession, or the sacrament of penance, from its beginnings in the early church, through mediaeval ages when books known as "penitentials" were the guides, to the place where private confession was the method. At the time of the Protestant Reformation the ideas and practice regarding confession took diverse paths. Lutheranism, representative of Protestantism as a whole, advocated voluntary confession to a brother Christian and emphasized the place of faith in obtaining forgiveness. Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, developed a detailed, legalistic system with contrition, confession and satisfaction as the three integral parts. The whole process was kept under the close direction of the clergy with an emphasis on works.

The Sacrament of Penance was set down concisely and concretely in Roman Catholicism by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and has not changed appreciably to this day. Roman Catholic theologians, however, are aware of the advances in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy, and psychiatry. A few Roman Catholic priests are even directing some of their neurotic and emotionally ill penitents to specialists in these fields. Their



purpose is not to substitute these new fields of discovery for the confessional but to help their penitents to wholesome emotional maturity in an effort to make the sacrament of penance more meaningful and a real source of help.

Roman Catholic leaders certainly seem headed in the right direction but I am convinced, as a Protestant and as a social worker, that there are three basic ideas inherent in the Roman Catholic confessional that are intolerable. Firstly, the priest assumes that the thing about which the person in the confessional feels guilty has a close relationship to the thing about which he should feel guilty and, therefore, for which he should seek forgiveness. In many cases the transformation needed to cleanse the personality often has little relation in the conscious mind of the person to what he thinks is troubling him. The traditional confessional has dealt, and to some extent must deal, with what the individual feels is wrong rather than what actually is wrong, although as we have seen there is a trend toward recognition of emotional difficulties. The confessional is guilt-centered and as such may cause considerable harm.

Secondly, no matter how it is portrayed the Roman Catholic confessional, or sacrament of penance, is nevertheless administered in a judicial procedure. Bishop Fulton Sheen beautifully portrays the ideal confessor, but unfortunately it is a long distance from the actual situation.



Confession demands a confessor: a man who will look kindly on the denying Peters, speak words of forgiveness to penitent Magdalenes, breathe words of comradeship to betraying Judases; a man who will utter a cry of forgiveness as if from a cross to all those who would malign him or his office; a man with intensity of love for his work and with universality of love for his penitents; a man endowed with the wisdom that comes with training, one in whom the Church has laid the wisdom garnered from twenty centuries' experience with souls; a man signed with the sign and sealed with the seal of Christ, and therefore, one who can love without loving; a man of discretion, that is, with a mind strange to curiosity, vanity, and fear; and, finally, a man with a heart like an immense well into which sins like stones may be dropped, but a well so deep that no sound comes back from those depths to an ear which might be bent to hear.<sup>33</sup>

The minister of the sacrament, acting as a judge, is responsible for ascertaining the gravity of the sins committed and whether the penitent is properly sorry. This judicial system is too coldly formal and puts too great a responsibility on the ministering priest.

Thirdly, the demand for the detailed enumeration of sins seems to indicate that "sins" are more important than "sin", and legal restraint than inner motivation. Further, the present day confessional box, with its square foot of heavy screen as the avenue of communication, is not conducive to face to face relationships but seems to be the maximum effort to make a personal contact impersonal.

Despite my disagreement with certain factors of the Roman Catholic confessional system it has been, and is, a



most admirable place of release for "pent-up" feelings and guilt. To any person, especially a devout penitent, the opportunity of "verbalizing" about one's feelings and sins in itself is of great therapeutic value, as well as spiritual balm. I earnestly believe that the good derived from the Roman Catholic confessional system far outweighs the harmful effects it has produced. The Roman Catholic authorities are to be commended for keeping intact such a meaningful system.

Protestants, as a whole, seem to have forgotten the therapeutic value of confession. By regarding it as voluntary they seem to have thought that this was the occasion for avoiding it or omitting it altogether. Confession, today, is oft-times reduced to a general confession recited in unison in church services. Confession, however, is a basic need of the individual. It is part of the system of purging and cleansing which one feels in need of to be in right relationship to one's God. To the one who confesses "shams are over and realities have begun; he has exteriorized his rottenness". As long as a sin is secret there needs to be continual concealing and repression. Neurotic tensions become active around evasions and defense. Guilt feelings when deprived of an outlet create havoc in the personality. Confession of guilt feelings is good catharsis; releasing the "pent-up" feelings into open expression. Confession is necessary to maintain religious and emotional health.



To talk aloud is to expel and cast out evil, to deliver it into the keeping of others, whose hearing verifies and acknowledges the declaration. To talk with another about one's anxieties is to objectify them, to detach them from secret inner rootage and hold them out in public view as separate from the self who surrenders them....confession of sin is a way of deliverance from sin.<sup>34</sup>

Although Protestants have neglected confession per se Protestant ministers have been instrumental in helping to develop the art known as pastoral counseling which is a part of what is sometimes technically called psychotherapy. This art includes methods and techniques in interviewing and counseling and offers a fascinating new slant to the idea of the confessional. The remainder of the thesis will be concerned with this comparatively new field of endeavour and will attempt to show how the local minister can be most effective in this field.

The term counseling is generally applied to interviewing processes where a professional person deals with individuals who are maladjusted, perplexed, or seeking guidance and where attempts are made to help them adjust to their problems and face the realities of life more constructively. Such contacts or interviews, with their curative aim, may be called psychotherapy, a term which social workers and psychiatrists use frequently. Some people prefer to use the term counseling for casual contacts and interviews and to use the term psychotherapy for intensive, long term interviews which involve more complex

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Paul E. Johnson, Psychology of Religion, Abingdon Press, New York, 1955, p. 219.



reorganization of the personality. There appears to be no valid reason for this distinction, therefore, we shall use the terms interchangeably.

Techniques and methods in most fields, especially those dealing with individuals, are constantly changing and the field of counseling is no exception. One of the oldest techniques, and one which is now in disrepute, is that of ordering and prohibiting. In many of the oldest records in early established social agencies there invariably is a description of a social situation followed by the phrase "person warned and advised". This method has been scrapped not because it was lacking in humanitarian feelings and the best of intentions, but because it proved ineffective. The personal forces brought upon the individual did not have the therapeutic effect desired. Such forced direction and threats alter, for a limited time, superficial behavior; they are not techniques which basically alter human behavior.

Secondly, there was the approach or technique called "exhortation". The technique was to get the individual emotionally "worked up" to where he would commit himself to a desired goal such as signing a pledge "to give up booze" or promise to stop stealing or to "quit sinning". This technique was not limited to individuals but was used with groups also, and in religious circles the revival meeting is a good example. This technique has also been scrapped, except in certain primitive



religious groups, because the inevitable result to such a method is a relapse. Such methods were fruitless in bringing forth concrete changes or realistic results.

Thirdly, there was the use of encouragement by suggestion. The individual is told by various ways that he is improving. This is done with the hope that it will reinforce his motivation. L. F. Shaffer in his book, The Psychology of Adjustment says that this method is basically repressive. In reality, it refuses to accept the problem as it is, and also denies the feelings which the individual may have about his problem. It prevents the individual from bringing out his mixed feelings and mixed reactions that he may have. Fortunately this method is declining rapidly in counseling circles.

The giving of advice, sometimes rightly called intervention, was, and still is, commonly used in counseling. In this method the counselor is the one who chooses the goal to be aimed at and interferes in the client's life to make certain that he is moving in the chosen direction. Although trained counselors know the violence of such a method, many unknowingly fall victim to it. The method violates the freedom of the client and indicates that the counselor, by his training and ability, has a right to interfere in the person's life. This is a gross injustice to the client and a betrayal of his best interests. The giving of advice is found in phrases such as: "If I were you...," "I would strongly recommend...," "I think



that you should...,"; "...that's the way it looks to me."

Widespread as this method has been it has two obvious weaknesses: an independent person will reject advice and suggestion in order to keep his own dignity; a dependent person will be forced into a deepening of his dependency. The method may provide a superficial solution to a pressing problem but it does nothing for basic emotional growth.

"Intellectual interpretation" is the name of another approach. With the advance in the study of human behavior and the understanding achieved counselors began to make elaborate diagnoses of individuals. Next they explained to the individual concerned the reason for his behavior with the hope that changed attitudes and a changed person would result. It was a "naive faith that this intellectual explanation of the difficulty would result in changed attitudes and feelings". Interpretation, although absolutely accurate, has no value unless it is accepted and assimilated by the client. For treatment to result there must be an emotional acceptance as well as an intellectual understanding.

In the preceding chapters the technique of confession, in history, was traced. This technique allowed the person to "verbalize" or "talk out" his sins or problems to a priest or another believer who provided a limited measure of acceptance. The Church and those who took advantage of this method were helped. This technique, with variations, has not been scrapped,



but has been developed and more widely accepted and used. Psychoanalysis has taken the method and made deeper use of it. Confession not only frees the person from conscious guilt feelings, but when continued may bring to the surface submerged harmful attitudes which influence overt behavior. The old approach of confession is today seen in techniques such as play therapy, and psychodramatics.

The methods of ordering and prohibiting, "exhortation", encouragement by suggestion, advice giving (intervention), "intellectual interpretation" have one factor in common. They take for granted that the counselor is the one most able to decide the goals of the individual, and also that the counselor is the one most able to set up the value judgments in the situation. In other words it is the counselor who always knows the best.

In confession this assumption is not made...the goal is not chosen by the counselor. The person or individual involved knows, even if vaguely, what he wants to be as a person and his confessing indicates his shortcomings and failures in achieving his goal. This probably explains why confession or "catharsis" is the only one of the methods which has continued to live on and be developed and improved. Carl R. Rogers said the following at a lecture given at the Symposium on Emotional Development at Oberlin College:

No approach which relies upon knowledge, upon training, upon the acceptance of something that is taught, is of any use. These approaches seem



so tempting and direct that I have, in the past, tried a great many of them. It is possible to explain a person to himself, to prescribe steps which should lead him forward, to train him in knowledge about a more satisfying mode of life. But such methods are, in my experience, futile and inconsequential. The most they can accomplish is some temporary change, which soon disappears, leaving the individual more than ever convinced of his inadequacy.<sup>35</sup>

As the trial and error method in counseling continued a new approach developed which had its roots in different sources. One important source was Otto Rank and his "relationship therapy" as enlarged and altered by Frederick Allen and Jessie Taft. Another important source was modern Freudian psychoanalysis and its development of therapeutic thinking. Karen Horney has also made a most significant contribution.

This new approach has the individual as the primary focus, not the problem. Its direction is toward maximum independence and integration of the individual. The purpose is not the solution of one particular problem, but to help the individual to "grow" so that he has the resources to meet the present problem as well as future problems. The New approach relies strongly on the individual drive toward growth, and adjustment. It considers that therapy is not doing something to the individual or of prodding him to do something about himself but rather it is a matter of releasing him for normal

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Carl R. Rogers, Healing: Human and Divine, Section One, "Becoming A Person", Simon Doniger, Editor, Associated Press, p. 59.



growth and development, of removing "blocks" that are hindering normal progress.

In addition, this new approach puts considerable stress on the emotional elements (the feeling aspects of the situation) rather than on the intellectual elements. It indicates that most poor adjustments or maladjustments are not primarily caused by not knowing, but that knowledge is not having the desired result because it is blocked by the emotional satisfactions the person has from the maladjustment.

Further, in the new therapy, the immediate situation receives more attention than the person's past.

The significant emotional patterns of the individual, those which serve a purpose in his psychological economy, those which he needs to consider seriously, show up just as well in his present adjustment, and even in the counseling hour, as they do in his past history.<sup>36</sup>

A notable characteristic is that this new approach emphasizes the "therapeutic relationship itself as a growth experience". In methods previously dealt with the growth was not expected, or the change to take place, until after the person leaves the interview. In this new method, the therapeutic contact is itself an experience of growth. In the interview the person learns to know, appreciate and understand himself, to make important, independent decisions, and to establish solid relationships with other people in a mature way.

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Carl R. Rogers, Counseling and Psychotherapy, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942, p. 29.



This new method or therapy is not a preparation for change, it is change.

The process of the new psychotherapy is difficult to put into meaningful words. To clarify the process an attempt will be made to describe it in twelve steps. The divisions of the process into steps or sections is to simplify explanation and to avoid confusion. It is not to be thought that the sections are as separated as indicated by the twelve steps or that successive interviews necessarily follow the steps. In processes of therapy there is intermingling of the processes and a free flowing from one step to the other.

Firstly, when the individual comes for help it must be realized that this in itself is a major step in therapy. Preceding this primary move there has been failure and indecision and a groping for self-understanding which may have gone on for months or even years. After struggling with himself the individual has taken himself in hand and taken an independent step. We are here, of course, assuming that the individual has come on his own initiative and not been brought or forced to come by a parent, wife, or friend. If the individual has come on his own initiative, that is if he has accepted the responsibility for bringing himself, he will undoubtedly accept the responsibility of working on his problems.

The second step generally sees a definition of the helping situation. From the very beginning the individual learns



that the counselor does not have the answers. The counselor makes it clear that he will provide a place and an atmosphere of acceptance where problems can be carefully thought through and the matter of relationships seen in a new light. The counselor does not indicate any responsibility to give the answers. Through words and an atmosphere of acceptance the individual is helped to feel that the counseling interview or hour is his, which implies that it is his responsibility to use it for an opportunity of growth.

Thirdly, the counselor assists the individual to complete expression of his feelings about the problem. This is often achieved, not by words, but by the counselor's acceptance and receptive attitude. Acceptance is defined by Biestek as: "perception, acknowledgment, and reception of the client as he actually is, not as we wish him to be or think him to be." It is in reality a favorable response to a person without necessarily sanctioning his conduct. Carl Rogers says of this important aspect:

Little by little we have learned to keep from blocking the flow of hostility and anxiety, the feelings of concern and the feelings of guilt, the ambivalences and the indecisions which come out freely if we have succeeded in making the client feel that the hour is truly his, to use as he wishes. I suppose that it is here that counselors have exercised the most imagination and have most rapidly improved their techniques of catharsis (confession).<sup>37</sup>

In the fourth step the counselor accepts the negative reactions and attempts to clarify them. In accepting these

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid. p. 35.



reactions the counselor responds to the underlying feelings and not to the intellectual content or intellectual aspects of what the individual says. Feelings of deep hatred and hostility, feelings of inadequacy and immaturity, feelings that alternate and are ambivalent are allowed to flow forth in the conducive atmosphere. Such a setting of acceptance will help the individual recognize his negative reactions and he will, by externalizing them in expression, accept them as a part of himself. No longer will he need to have extensive and intricate defense mechanisms, nor will he need to project his feelings on others because he now has the resources to see himself as he really is. The counselor must often verbally clarify these negative feelings. By this action he shows he is aware of them and that he accepts and appreciates them. If in clarifying the counselor has rightly reflected the real situation it gives the individual a sense of relief and releases him to progress with more ease and more abandon. In clarifying it is vitally important that the counselor move at the individual's pace or rate of speed. Clarification must never go beyond what the individual has expressed. The counselor, because he is objective (not emotionally involved), can see beyond what is expressed, but it is a grave error to try to force the individual beyond what he has expressed verbally and consciously accepted.

Step number five is closely connected with step number



four. The fully expressed negative feelings are followed by experimental expressions of positive impulses. The expression of these positive feelings or impulses is essential for growth. If the negative and antagonistic expressions have been forceful and pregnant with emotion and depth of feeling and they are duly accepted and recognized by the counselor, the positive expressions of love, self-respect, and tendency to maturity will be more certain. In a marital counseling situation a wife may denounce her husband in most vivid terms and when she is over this temporary explosion of expression and realizes her negative feelings are accepted she will then say something like this, "And sometimes he can be so very nice".

Step number six. The positive feelings are accepted and recognized by the counselor in the same way he accepted the antagonistic or negative feelings. The positive feelings are never accepted by commendation or praise. Moralistic values, or sanctioning of conduct, do not enter this new approach. This is one of the most difficult things for ministers to realize. People generally label ministers as moralists and many ministers unfortunately live up to this label. They unfortunately are more concerned with the rightness or wrongness of a situation than with the individuals concerned. Their total ministry whether it be preaching, pastoral work, or daily routine of life is tinged by it. Moralistic values cannot be included in this type of psychotherapy. You cannot have complete



acceptance of the individual and the sanction of his conduct together. They are incompatible. It is also especially on this point of moralistic values that this new approach differs from the Roman Catholic confessional. The Roman Catholic confessional is a guilt centered, moralistic, judicial system. The individual is received in a very limited degree of acceptance and the officiating priest is in the role of judge, not helper. Such a system allows "pent-up" feelings to be expressed but it is not a place of growth. The "sins" receive more concern than does the individual.

The positive and negative feelings are accepted in the same way.

It is this acceptance of both the mature and the immature impulses, of the aggressive and the social attitudes, of the guilt feelings and the positive expressions, which gives the individual an opportunity for the first time in his life to understand himself as he is.<sup>38</sup>

In this relaxed atmosphere of acceptance there is no need to be on the defensive and rationalize about antagonisms. Also the individual does not have the chance to exaggerate the importance of his positive feelings. In this conducive setting, a modern day miracle takes place. Insight and an understanding and true appreciation of the self takes place and there emerges a truly "born again" individual: "born again" because a counselor in love and respect for human personality and freedom accepted an individual without condemnation or commendation but just as he was.

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid. p. 40.



Step seven, as already partially indicated, is the achieving of insight. Insight which is the accepting and understanding of the self is the basic foundation that needs building before the other levels of new integration can be constructed. A casework glossary defines Insight therapy as:

Under psycho-analytic supervision, using the transference relationship to help the client understand and re-live his irrational impulses, how they arose in the past and how the present situation differs, so that he may modify his behaviour accordingly.

This is different from the insight or flashes of insight which a client himself achieves independently through his use of the counseling interview.

Step number eight is often closely associated or intermingled with the process of insight and is the clarifying of decisions and various courses of action or direction. The counselor helps the client through mutual, rational and intellectual discussion to more clearly understand himself, the people with whom he associates, and the circumstances he faces. At this point many counselors interfere unwittingly and urge a certain course of action or give advice.

Step nine is the starting of small, but significant, positive actions. Once adequate insight has been achieved and the individual has better understanding of himself and his emotions action will generally be in line with the new insight. Because the individual has been the main participant in the "growing" situation he will be able to carry out with real



motivation the type of action which will help solve the problem or problems.

The counselor may have long before seen the necessity of such action but had he suggested it the suggestion would have been rejected or probably unsuccessfully carried out. When action grows out of his "own insightful drive to be a better, more mature person, it will be successful".

Step ten is the developing of additional insight--a more complete understanding of the self as the person gains ego strength to see and accept the deeper aspects of his actions.

The eleventh step is continued positive action by the individual. Choices are made with less fear and indecision. At this point the relationship with the counselor is at its height. The person may show interest in the counselor as a person. There will be less dependence and fear will give way to release.

The twelfth and final step is encountered when the individual has reached sufficient independence and maturity to feel that he can handle his problems by himself. He realizes, oft-times even reluctantly, that the relationship with the counselor must end. The wise counselor accepts and recognizes the individual's growth and does not compel the individual to leave nor does he attempt to hold the individual. The individual usually apologizes for having taken so much time and often indicates what his coming has meant to him. A time



limit on further interviews is set and finally the interviews are brought to a healthy finish.

Attempts have been made to describe the new process of psychotherapy in twelve steps. A further attempt will now be made to enlarge on some of the more vital areas in the process.

Firstly, the initial contact of person and counselor is vitally important. It is this contact, and its resulting decisions, which often determines eventual success or failure in helping the person. The first assessment an efficient counselor will make is to determine the state of stress of the person who has come to him. Counseling demands a certain amount of "psychological distress arising out of a condition of disequilibrium". These stresses may have a psychical origin arising from conflicting desires. One individual may be torn between intense guilt feelings and a strong sex desire. Many times these stresses are due to the environment and the person's needs coming into conflict. Marriage often creates more problems than it solves. It demands that young people adopt mature ways and this may conflict with a desire for dependence. The sexual side of marriage may also create anxiety and stress especially if one of the partners has sex taboos. A student may be suddenly thrown "into a panic" when the university or high school begins to exert pressure on him because of his poor grades. Sickness of the father or "breadwinner" of the house may cause severe economic deprivation and may cause a rather



unstable family relationship to deteriorate completely resulting in severe guilt feelings. Sickness of the mother with young children may require drastic changes in routine for the father and the older children and will "break" a dependent father. Death, with all its implications, may cause an unstable person to have severe conflicts because of an inability to cope without the deceased. No matter what the circumstances are, before counseling can be effective, the anxiety caused by conflicting desires and demands must be more painful to the individual than the difficulty and stress of finding a solution to the conflict or demands. In other words the present discomfort must be great enough to counter-balance the difficulty of verbalizing or speaking out the personal attitudes and the repressed feelings which may be involved in the problem.

Another major concern is that counseling or psychotherapy depends on the strength of the individual to take action to change his life course. The counselor must, at the outset, judge whether the situation can be changed, and what if any, alternative satisfactions and ways of dealing with the situation are possible. Unfortunately there are people so burdened by dire circumstances or so weakened by inferiority feelings and inadequacies that no reorganizing of the attitudes would allow them to face life on a normal, realistic basis. The basic assets of the individual must be evaluated. The factors that require consideration are: the hereditary back-



ground which should include the level of physical and emotional stability of the family; physical factors such as long illnesses and glandular disorders; family influences determining the security of the home; economic and cultural influence; social experience of the individual with those in the same age groups; education; and lastly the matter of self-insight and the ability to take responsibility and to be self-critical.

It must be realized that with psychotic individuals, those who are losing or have lost contact with reality, that counseling per se will not benefit them because their withdrawal will not permit sufficient expression and also because there isn't adequate stability to command the life situation. Similarly mentally defective persons are poor counselling prospects. Neither is counseling for the well adjusted person who feels no discomfort in his life adjustment. Counseling is a process which is of help mainly to those who are suffering from tensions and maladjustments. Extreme neurotics and psychotics require the skilled training of a psychiatrist; physically sick individuals require knowledge and help of a medical doctor. An effective minister should establish professional contact with these men so that direction and referral when necessary can be easily achieved.

Carl Rogers has an excellent summary of conditions indicating counseling or psychotherapy. The summary is self-explanatory and needs no further comment.



1. The individual is under a degree of tension, arising from incompatible personal desires or from the conflict of social and environmental demands with individual needs. The tension and stress so created are greater than the stress involved in expressing his feelings about his problems.
2. The individual has some capacity to cope with life. He possesses adequate ability and stability to exercise some control over the elements of his situation. The circumstances with which he is faced are not so adverse or so unchangeable as to make it impossible for him to control or alter them.
3. There is an opportunity for the individual to express his conflicting tensions in planned contacts with the counselor.
4. He is able to express these tensions and conflicts either verbally or through other media. A conscious desire for help is advantageous, but not entirely necessary.
5. He is reasonably independent, either emotionally or spatially, of close family control.
6. He is reasonably free from excessive instabilities, particularly of an organic nature.
7. He possesses adequate intelligence for coping with his life situation, with an intelligence rating of dull-normal or above.
8. He is of suitable age--old enough to deal somewhat independently with life, young enough to retain some elasticity of adjustment. In terms of chronological age this might mean roughly from ten to sixty.<sup>39</sup>

A word should be said about the physical setting of the interview because this may determine its entire potentiality. Some degree of privacy and a comfortable relaxed atmosphere are vitally important. The individual has a right to feel

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. pp. 76,77.



that, whether the interview lasts five minutes or an hour, he has, for that time, the undivided attention of the counselor. Interruptions, telephone calls, and so on, should be reduced to the bare minimum. Nothing is more disconcerting to an individual who is verbalizing about his intimate feelings than to have the telephone ring or to have someone knock on the door and ask to see the minister. The interruption often breaks the chain of thinking and it is difficult after a few minutes to resume the feeling and the problem being discussed. If an interruption has been unavoidable, it is always helpful to give the individual some recognition that these are disturbing and that we can understand that they make it more difficult for him to proceed. Further if he protests that they have not troubled him, it is best to accept his statement at its face value.

The length of the interview is dependent upon many factors. In counseling it is good practise to have the individual know ahead of time that he will have a certain amount of time by appointment and that he may use it all or not as he wishes. In general, it is seldom helpful to have the interview last more than an hour. Longer interviews exhaust both counselor and the individual. Overly long interviews indicate that the individual has been "trapped" into telling more than he wanted to and the result is guilt feelings. These guilt feelings about having revealed too much may be severe



enough that the individual will not return for additional counseling. Long interviews also indicate that the interview was ineffective with too much time wasted in rambling. When an individual knows that his interview will end at a definite time it may encourage him to organize his material and present it more concisely. Rather than have an extended interview it is wiser to let the individual have time to digest and think over what he has said and what has been said to him. After a reasonable time, a second interview will be more effective. It gives the individual a greater sense of direction and security if he and the counselor fix a definite time for the next appointment. Efficiency in the interview relationship is best achieved by giving the client during the interview comfortable surroundings, undivided attention, and sufficient time to express himself.

We have assumed that most interviews will take place in the church office. The advantages of an office interview are many, it provides greater opportunity for quiet conversation with a certain freedom from distracting interruptions. The church office is preferred because when people seek out help for themselves they are more likely to make use of it. The effort required in leaving the home and going to an office is often an indication of the ability the client has to exercise some self-direction. The convenience and comfort of the church office is insufficient reason, however, to refuse to visit



individuals in their home. There are times when the person cannot come to the church office, and there are other times when he needs help and may later be able to bring himself to the office. If the minister is rigid in his refusal to go out and offer his services, he may lose a valuable opportunity to help where he is really needed. A person's failure to come into the church office may have been due to his ignorance of the nature of a minister's service.

One of the most important aspects of counseling is the counseling relationship. Greater emphasis needs to be put on this subtle inter-relationship which develops between counselor and counselee. It is difficult to arrive at an adequate definition of the relationship without going into considerable detail. A social work glossary defines the term as used in the practice of social casework as:

The progressive interaction of two persons for the purpose of assisting one of them to make a better adjustment to a problem; a mutual and reciprocal interest (it is recognized that all relationships have certain transference elements in them).<sup>40</sup>

In Freudian psychoanalysis a comparable relationship is built up but the analyst adopts a parental role. Brown says of the analyst in the therapeutic relationship:

He becomes immediately surrogate for one of the real parents. Thus he becomes the parent or father confessor to whom everything may really be told without fear of punishment or recrimination, the

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<sup>40</sup>A. D. Abrahamson, Helen McCrae, Helen Exner, Casework Glossary, Publication of The School of Social Work, University of British Columbia, 1954, p. 3.



father who will understand and show no amazement or emotional resentment at even the usually most unspeakable emotional facts.<sup>41</sup>

The counseling relationship we are concerned with is more akin to the definition of relationship as given for social casework. Freudian psychoanalysis, which is generally for highly disturbed individuals, may need the analyst as the parental figure but for counseling by a minister it is best avoided although without doubt there will be some transference if a successful counseling relationship is established.

In a counseling relationship there must be responsiveness on the part of the counselor which makes rapport (to be in harmonious relation) possible, and which slowly develops into a deeper emotional relationship. For the counselor this is a controlled relationship which shows itself in genuine interest in the individual and the acceptance and appreciation of him as a person. The counselor in dealing with a person cannot remain completely objective nor can he become emotionally involved to the extent that he cannot help the person. He must develop what is called "empathy" which is a feeling with, but not like, another person; a form of intellectual identification. If he becomes coldly objective the person will think he is disinterested and treatment will be ineffective; if he becomes emotionally involved the counselor as well as the person being counseled will need help. This matter of "empathy" is vitally

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Brown, J. F. Psychodynamics of Abnormal Behavior, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1940, p. 290.



important and is so necessary for good counseling.

Another essential quality of the counseling relationship is a permissive atmosphere to enable expression of feelings. The counselor must accept the individual's statements without moralizing or judging them. As the individual feels he is being accepted and understood he realizes that all his feelings can be safely "vented" without reprimand. All attitudes and feelings should be allowed expression. Feelings of aggression, guilt, hatred, conflicts, remorse, antagonism, resentment should be permitted to be expressed even when some of them are expressed against the counselor or the church. This is where the counseling relationship is unique. It offers the individual the opportunity to express feelings and attitudes which may be socially unacceptable; it gives him the opportunity of venting all "the forbidden impulses and unspoken attitudes which complicate his life". It is freedom of expression with "no holds barred".

Although complete freedom of expression is allowed there are certain limits in the counseling interview. These limits, set within the bounds of reality, actually help the client. In the matter of appointments the individual may break them, come in late, or use the hour for idle chit-chat purposely avoiding discussion of his real problems. One limitation is that the individual is not at liberty to control the counselor and gain additional time. Many individuals will wait till the latter



part of an interview to bring up vital material, trusting that he will be granted more time. A wise counselor holds to the set time limits. If an hour interview has been arranged and the individual is half an hour late he should rightly be allowed only half an hour even though he may by subtle or other means attempt to go overtime.

Freedom from coercion is another characteristic of the counseling relationship. The wise counselor realizes that the hour belongs to the counselee, and to him alone, and he does not force his wishes, suggestions, reactions into the "healing" relationship. This refusal to interfere on the part of the counselor is not a negative holding back. It is necessary for personality growth which involves personal choice on the part of the counselee, who with the help of the counselor, sees the implications involved.

What does such freedom of expression in an atmosphere of complete acceptance mean to a troubled individual? The lack of moral approval or disapproval causes a definite response on the part of the individual. He discovers he does not have to couch his behaviour behind a myriad of defenses. Because he receives neither blame nor praise the individual need not have his psychological defenses up and he is also protected from a too contented dependence. This allows, probably for the first time in his life, his real self to come to the fore and permits him to evaluate his behaviour more realistically.



Every counseling interview has limits. A wise counselor tries to define his responsibility and have it understood early in the interview. If this is not done the limit may have to be set up at a crucial point in the interview and cause a negative reaction on the part of the counselee and may in certain cases cause a serious setback in the counseling relationship. One of the initial and commonest problems of counseling or psychotherapy is the counselee's demand that the counselor take over his problem. This common reaction demands deft handling by the counselor and the setting of definite limits. By subtle means the counselee may try to force the lead, and by implication the responsibility, on the counselor. By this he indicates he will answer questions while the counselor solves the problem. The counselor, when he senses that the responsibility is being put on him for the solution of the problem, may indicate that instead of the counselee asking him questions and getting information it might be helpful to consider the interview as a time when discussion of the problem takes place. The discovery by an individual that he is responsible for himself in a counseling relationship is a real growth feature. One individual writes of this experience:

I was lost in your presence, especially when I was told that I had an hour with you. I could either sit or talk or do as I pleased. The impression I received was of being left alone, all on my own with my problem. But I soon discovered that by talking of my indecision and problem I was able to see clearly that my problem



was being solved by my own initiative rather than the counseling of my interviewer.<sup>42</sup>

Further, in the counseling relationship the factor of authority needs to be discussed. Ministers, by virtue of their office, are figures of authority. When, from their pulpit, they say, "Thus saith the Lord!" they are definitely taking an authoritative role. The question now arises as to the role of the minister as a counselor to members of his congregation. Can the minister as a counselor maintain a counseling relationship with a member of his congregation and at the same time exercise authority over him? Psychotherapy and authority cannot exist together in the same relationship. You cannot have an atmosphere of permissiveness when authority enters the interview. The solution to this problem is not simple and a stock answer would be unsatisfying. A proposed solution is that when the minister is in the pulpit he continue to function as an authority figure because this part of his office demands this. When he is functioning as a counselor the situation demands that he give up the authority function and be engaged solely in the capacity of counselor. In other words, the minister functions in two different capacities at different times.

This problem can be illustrated by a school teacher who is also a counselor. In the classroom he has certain authority;

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<sup>42</sup>

C. R. Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, 1951, p. 71.



he assigns certain duties; and he must concern himself with his obligations to the welfare of the group. This concern often conflicts with feelings he might wish to take toward an individual pupil. In the counseling situation, outside the classroom, his relationship to an individual pupil is different from the relationship in the classroom. To do this, the definition of limits, must clearly be made.

The minister is in a comparable situation. In the pulpit as a spokesman for God he is in a position of leadership; in meetings he is generally the chairman; in the community at large he is looked upon as a leader and a "prophet of righteousness". In the counseling situation his relationship to an individual is very different. In the interview he must create an atmosphere of acceptance and permissiveness and is obligated to move at the individual's rate of speed. The roles are very different but a minister who is willing to discipline himself, for the good of his people, can become effective in both fields. It is at this point that pastoral counseling in Protestant churches can differ from penance and the confessional in Roman Catholicism. The Protestant pastor is allowed to perform in two different capacities. The priest in Roman Catholicism does not have any such option. He must always be in a position of authority. Even in the confessional he is the judge and the penitent is the prisoner. This is most unfortunate because authority in the framework of counseling does not offer the same opportunities for personality growth.



In the type of non-directive counseling that has been discussed the counselor takes no responsibility for directing the outcome of the process. The individual comes "to talk out his problems" in an atmosphere of complete acceptance. Our concern now is the ways in which the counselor may conduct the interview to help the individual speak out those feelings which he needs to reveal.

As a person talks about his problems and himself, within the counseling relationship where psychological defences are not needed, the basic issues come forth. One of the accepted tenets of counseling is that "all roads lead to Rome," that any direction of expression, freely followed, leads to the uncovering of a fundamental conflict. Therefore, a good technique for interviewing is to allow free expression with the counselor refraining from any attempts to govern the content coming forth. Emotional factors, which are generally at the root of any maladjustment, are more readily understood by the person and counselor if the pattern of the person's feelings are followed.

This matter of responding to the feeling rather than the content is another point of importance. Culturally Canadians are trained to be concerned with ideas rather than feelings. A good counselor must reverse his cultural training and learn to concern himself with feelings rather than intellectual content. When a counselor responds to the attitudes a person expresses and clarifies these feelings, the interview is called client-



centered, and the verbalizing or the material which comes out is material that is pertinent to the person's problem. When a counselor responds to the intellectual content, the counselor takes the direction in the interview and follows his interest. This method may take twice as much time to arrive at the basic problem and may even block the person's expression of his problem. If the counselor alertly responds to the feelings that are expressed the person receives the satisfaction of feeling deeply understood and it gives him the opportunity to express deeper feelings which eventually will lead to the emotional roots of the maladjustment. The counselor, being an objective person in the interview, will undoubtedly see more of the interplay of personality than the counselee. Because of this advance on the counselee some counselors tend to prod the counselee by discussing emotionalized attitudes before the person can face them realistically. If, during an interview, there seems to be hostility aroused against the counselor it may be due to rushing the counselee past the point of his being able to accept the new attitudes that have come up. This "short-cut" method usually ends up being longer in the end and is best avoided. It is difficult to move at the counselee's speed but it is imperative if continual progress is desired.

Generally speaking the process of verbalizing or "talking out" is helpful and not apt to go off on a tangent. When a counselor is unsure of a correct course, it is acceptable



policy to let the client continue talking. If the counselee talks in a confused way about his problem neutral responses such as, "I don't seem to understand," or "Can you enlarge about that?" are in order and will help to clarify the counselee's feelings. It should be remembered that the most effective counseling is the expression of the counselee's attitudes and not the counselor's. The counselee, with help, must "work out his own salvation".

The values of complete expression are great. There is initially the emotional release from being able to express feelings that formerly needed repressing and as these feelings flow forth it is easy to see the physical relaxation that goes with it. The opportunity for uninhibited expression gives the counselee the chance to examine his problems more adequately. The mere fact of being able to express feelings without needing to defend the actions involved helps to clarify the situation.

As the person talks about himself and his problems in the relaxed atmosphere he becomes able to face himself without rationalizing about the mixed feeling he may have. In everyday life this is impossible because of the defensive "front" everyone maintains. It is a revealing experience to go behind the "front" and make a frank evaluation.

When the person finds that his hidden self is readily accepted by the counselor, the counselee accepts this hidden or undisclosed self as his own. Inadequacy and anxiety are



transformed into an acceptance of his strengths and weaknesses. Instead of attempting to be some one other than himself the counselee sees that there are benefits in being what he is and working out the potentialities he finds there. When the counselor creates a releasing atmosphere in which uninhibited expression can take place the counselee discovers that verbalizing his feelings leads to the releasing of unknown forces within himself, forces which formerly were used in creating and sustaining defensive reactions. These forces can now be used for constructive and useful purposes in personality adjustment. If the counseling goes no farther than full and free expression for the counselee it is most helpful and constructive. This type of counseling is most helpful for short-contact counseling. Oft-times a counselor, for various reasons, realizes that he will be limited to one interview. The usual practice in such a situation is to use directive counseling. Because time is short the counselor, isolating the problem, gives advice and direction. The results are usually negative. If, however, an enlightened counselor uses the limited time he has to release the person to verbalize or "talk out" his feelings, encouraging results generally follow. The counselee, even from the brief contact, leaves without any artificial "solution" but the whole problem is more clearly defined in his thinking and he is encouraged by the thought that someone understood and accepted him as he was. This method is preferred



to having some stock advice that only serves to increase his sense of inadequacy and add to already present guilt feelings.

The verbalizing or "talking out" of emotionalized attitudes, beneficial though they be, is not a full description of the processes which form good counseling or psychotherapy. The act of verbalizing brings more than relief and release, eventually it gives the individual a different understanding of himself. This new understanding is called insight. Insight is inseparably connected to the experience of catharsis and is based upon it. Two definitions of catharsis which fall within the scope of our study are; first the term as it is generally used in psychoanalytic studies and second as it may be loosely defined. 1. Release of tension and anxiety by emotionally reliving the incidents of the past and honestly facing the causes of difficulty. 2. The relaxation of emotional tension or anxiety by any kind of expressive reaction. The term insight involves the apprehending, after expression of repressions in an atmosphere of acceptance, new meaning in the person's own experience. The chart on the following page, which was taken from an Institute of casework given by Helen Exner in Manitoba, shows the various processes that are carried through before insight is gained. It should help clarify the interviewing process and show its vital importance.



INTERVIEWING AS A MEANS OF TREATMENT

Interviews flow in accordance with counselee's strength and need and counselor's skills.

Counselee's need and counselor's understanding together guide the interview as to content.

Counselor's skill guides flow of interview.

INTERVIEW BEGINS:

Rapport develops through 1. listening to and interest in problem counselee presents (focus may become unexpected)

2. meeting some concrete needs such as acceptance of person as he is and giving him the opportunity of "venting" his feelings.

Formation of relationship

Counselee's need plus counselor's understanding and focus on the elicit problem

SUFFICIENT CONSCIOUS ANXIETYBROUGHT OUT BY

listening  
ego support  
focussing on counselee's  
suggestions

HELD IN CHECK BY

acceptance  
ego support  
movement to surface  
considerations

to empower

mobilization of client's ego strength  
through

support of strengths

increasing awareness  
of strengths per-  
spective

Catharsis

lessening  
of tension  
lessening  
of block-  
ing

Clarification

(through re-  
cent events  
or past)  
  
rechannelling  
of need

insight

(clarification  
with abreaction  
of past emotions)

lessening of  
tension and of  
blocking

rechannelling of  
change of needs

Dangers:

over-reassurance

guilt from over-  
expression  
repetitive  
pattern

intellectual-  
ization as  
defense

ego  
threatened

STRENGTHENED EGO BETTER ABLE TO MEET PROBLEMS



Insight is gaining new perception of the self and gaining new understanding of the patterning of one's behaviour. Insight does not occur at once but is made up of pieces and is shown as much in actions as in words. It is not intellectual learning but is learning with deep emotional involvement, therefore verbal expression may not be clear. It comes only as the person develops adequate psychological strength to face up to the new apprehension of himself. Often insight involves more than the realization of the role which the person is playing, but also the realization of repression within himself. As long as these repressions are denied the person will need to keep up a wall of psychological defense but when they are accepted as a part of his being the defensive reactions vanish.

The matter of insight cannot be achieved in a counselee by action on the part of the counselor. It demands the ultimate in self-restraint on the counselor's part. The technique is the encouragement of expression until "insightful understanding" appears spontaneously. The main goal of the counselor is to aid the person to recognize his defensiveness which will cause them to diminish or vanish completely. When this is achieved the counselee is free to look at the total situation as it is without needing to rationalize or defend it. The counselor must exercise self-restraint because as the counselee discloses himself in the interview the counselor, because of his objectivity and training, will see the pattern of the problem of the



counselee much quicker. The temptation then arises to tell the counselee or interpret his actions and personality to him. The reaction to this interpretation, particularly if it is accurate, is to cause the wall of resistance to rise. For inexperienced counselors it is better to make use of no interpretation in the matter of insight. It is a good discipline to practise self-restraint here of all places in the interviewing process.

This may seem to contradict what was said in the previous paragraph but under certain optimum conditions, it is permissible to interpret to the counselee the material he has been giving. The interpretation, however, must be made solely on statements which the person has made. Thus the interpretation is actually clarification of what the counselee has seen himself. When doing this type of interpretation a wise counselor will use the counselee's terminology and symbolic language. This will make acceptance of the ideas easier. If any argument about the interpretation results it indicates the interpretation is not accepted emotionally as yet and it is best to drop the interpretation. If real insight has been achieved by the counselee he will immediately see its importance in new areas.

When a person has gained an important insight there is generally a slight relapse. It is no easy matter to suddenly realize one's weaknesses or the immature nature of one's behaviour. To step back into conversations of earlier inter-



views is a natural reaction to a painful experience. A wise counselor accepts this temporary relapse and does not attempt to argue the person to the point of insight which caused the relapse. Patience will show the counselor that the counselee is as anxious to get there as he is.

Now that we have superficially glimpsed at what insight is we will concern ourselves with the more involved aspects of what it means and actually is. First, it is the realizing that facts known before are related to the situation. It is exactly like putting a puzzle together. Various pieces have been looked at repeatedly when suddenly they are seen in a new relationship which completes a section or the complete puzzle. This type of apprehension of relationships is possible in counseling only when the counselee is released from defensive reactions through catharsis. The counselor may have seen the relationships of the parts of the puzzle long before but until the person can accept them emotionally it is futile to tell him. A mere intellectual acceptance of the problem by the counselee is unsatisfactory. In the area of emotionalized attitudes, the acceptance of which is always difficult, and where psychological defenses are easily raised, any transfer of perception from counselor to counselee is fraught with danger and difficulty.

Secondly, in the matter of insight there is the acceptance of the self. In the atmosphere of acceptance which the ideal counseling situation provides the counselee is given the



optimum of conditions to recognize his attitudes and impulses. In this atmosphere, where the person can reveal his formerly hidden and disguised self, feelings and attitudes that are not socially acceptable can be voiced as can the feelings that do not appear in agreement with the ideal self. The person can see the relationship between what he is (his true self), as he is accustomed to thinking of it, and the unacceptable impulses of his nature. Seeing this relationship he is freed to integrate himself into a whole unit, instead of a divided person who is perplexed by the difference between actions and intentions.

The third vitally important aspect of insight is that it includes the conscious choice of more positive, satisfying goals. When a person who has neurotic tendencies is able to see clearly the choice between his present meagre, limited satisfactions and the satisfactions of a mature adult, he will naturally prefer the latter. Psychotherapy can only help a person find additional satisfactions, to follow a path which later will be more rewarding. The person who is maladjusted undoubtedly has developed a type of behaviour reaction which brings certain satisfactions to his basic needs. In his adopted behaviour he may be threatened by others or by his environment and because he is emotionally all tied up in himself, he cannot see clearly any other course of action, which initially may be less gratifying, but more satisfying in the long run. In other



words he cannot look at the situation with any objectivity because of his emotional involvement. The counseling relationship, which aids release and helps eliminate defense reactions, gives the person the opportunity to look at his choices with a measure of objectivity and select those which will be most meaningful in the future. In insight this choice usually is between satisfactions which are immediate and temporary and those which come later but are more permanent and fulfilling.

As this third aspect of insight is understood it will be easier to see why insight is something which the counselee must achieve and why it cannot be given to him as advice or by means of education. It is a growth experience, which only the counselee can engage in. It involves choices that the counselee alone must make. It is important that the counselor assist the counselee by understanding acceptance but making no concerted effort to influence the counselee one way or another. It is up to the counselee to weigh the choices and if he has gone thus far in counseling the choice will undoubtedly be constructive.

As insight develops and decisions are made which bring the counselee to his new goals or satisfactions, action comes in which moves the counselee in the desired direction. This action, or actions, is the test of the reality of the insights achieved. If this action is lacking, that is if the insight is not backed up by action, it has not deeply involved the personality.



These self-started actions which help achieve the new and lasting satisfactions are most significant aspects of growth. They serve to give the counselee new confidence and a real sense of independence and therefore reinforce the steps to normalcy already taken. As these actions continue the counselee will begin to consider ending the "healing" relationship.

In client-centered psychotherapy the goal is not the solution of a mere problem or problems. Life, with all its vicissitudes is never without problems, therefore client-centered therapy tries to help the counselee integrate his personality so that he may more constructively face life and what it may have. Counseling helps the counselee to gain life that has a unified purpose, and helps him achieve courage to meet life and its problems with realistic and wholesome attitudes and knowledge. When the counseling relationship is ended the counselee does not have a "packaged" solution for each of his problems, but the ability and emotional capacity to meet his problems in a wholesome, positive manner.

When counseling has been successful and the matter of ending the interviews comes up the counselee will certainly have mixed feelings. He may still feel a sense of dependence and be unwilling to face the reality of facing his problems alone, or he may feel that by leaving he will be showing lack of appreciation to the counselor who has been so understanding. If these mixed feelings, that are exhibited, are handled



correctly it can be a further growth experience for the counselee. If the counselee is helped to see his feelings of dependence that are expressed, and also his desire to handle his own affairs it will serve to give him fresh insight.

It is natural to have wholesome feelings of regret in ending a counseling contact. The counselee has had the opportunity of emotional growth in an understanding relationship; the counselor has been privileged in being able to watch the counselee grow and develop. A wise counselor will recognize the regret he has and admit it as well as the counselee's feeling about the matter. As the counseling comes to a close the counselee will begin to show personal interest in the counselor. He may even attempt to keep the relationship alive on a social basis. This is not recommended for obvious reasons because friendship does not aid counseling should it again be required.

Occasionally in the concluding counseling contacts the counselee will try to express what the new experience has meant to him. Because the counselee has lived through this new experience he tries to describe it in his own way and from his feeling make plain the value it has for him.

Attempts have been made to show the process by which counseling or psychotherapy is carried on. There are undoubtedly many questions that arise about the principles presented and the technique itself. An effort will be made to answer some of the questions that may arise. Firstly, there is the question of



the time interval between interviews. Experiments, which incidentally are few on timing, indicate that a week apart is effective, giving the counselee a chance to assimilate what he has gained, achieve insight, and move on to concerted action.

Secondly, the question arises about note-taking during the interview. On this question there can be no definite answer as each counselor must choose for himself. Some say that the success of psychotherapy is in direct proportion to the adequacy of the record kept. Other counselors do not take notes during an interview because they feel it will look as though something was being kept secret. One counselor who takes notes explains to the counselee that he likes to jot down important aspects that he can study afterwards. He also gives the counselee the opportunity of looking at the notes if he wishes. Some counselors do not take notes in an interview but immediately following an interview they put down everything that appeared of importance. If notes are taken they should be put in a locked filing cabinet or desk away from prying eyes. The counselee has bared his soul and inner thoughts and our respect for personality and human dignity should ensure that what has been told us is kept in strict privacy. The seal of the confessional should be as binding on our counseling sessions as the seal is to a Roman Catholic priest. It is definitely part of the trust that is put on us as ministers that we respect the personal, private lives of those who have



come to us. Nothing is more damning to a counseling relationship than a counselor who betrays the trust of privacy.

Thirdly, some who are trained in the directive counseling methods will ask if the type of counseling advocated here demands less of the counselor in the way of concentration and study. There has definitely been strong emphasis on client-centered counseling or indirect counseling and such a question is quite legitimate. Although in indirect counseling the counselor does very little talking he is obligated to do much more thinking and concentration. The counselor must continually be alert to the counselee's feeling and must develop adeptness at using words to release growth. The demands of client-centered counseling are great although on the surface it may appear that the counselor is a mere reflector who would serve as well being fast asleep. Nothing could be further from the truth however, because it is more difficult to refrain from speaking and advising than it is to speak.

Fourthly, many will have conceived the idea that the process of psychotherapy described is only for long term counseling and may wonder about brief contacts. The process described is applicable to both short term and long term counseling. Even if there is only one contact and that only an hour in length the counselor can enable the person to verbalize about himself and his problem and leave with better recognition of the issues he must resolve.



Many ministers who have had little opportunity to take counseling courses may wonder how they could possibly do a successful job in this complex field. Because of their wrong conception of counseling and counselors they may neglect the field and thus deprive themselves of much usefulness and their flocks of genuine help. An ideal counselor is not a "psychological superhuman" who is omniscient and who towers above the rest of humanity in understanding and ability.

The basic qualification for a counselor is that he be sensitive to human relationships. A person who is not aware of other people's reactions, who does not sense feelings of hostility or kindness which transpire between himself and others or between friends is not likely to make a good counselor. A person who is observant of others' reactions and can sense the feeling of others and knows when difficulty and hostility are present has a good innate base on which to construct counseling skills.

On the base of sensitivity to others a good counselor must develop these essential attitudes: 1. A good counselor needs to have objectivity. Objectivity is sometimes described as "emotional detachment", or "empathy", or "constructive composure". Included in it is a feeling with, but not like, another person, a genuine receptivity and interest, real understanding which finds it impossible to pass moral judgments or be alarmed. Objectivity is a middle course between cold, formal detachment



and sentimental emotional involvement. 2. A good counselor needs to have a deep-rooted respect for people. He must accept them as they actually are and not as he wishes them to be or thinks them to be. He must allow them to make their own decisions and choices. 3. A good counselor needs to have a realistic understanding of himself, of his emotional patterns, and of his weaknesses. He needs to have insight into his biases and emotions to prevent them from colouring his counseling. 4. To do acceptable counseling the counselor needs to have a broad basis of knowledge of human behaviour. He needs knowledge of the physical, psychological, religious and social aspects of man.

In conclusion, we would state again the thought put forth in the first chapter of our study--that the main source of difficulty in our world arises from human relationships. Jesus saw this truth and gave us the great principle of love to conquer it. To give us this principle he gave himself. The apostle Paul tried his utmost to put the principle of love into practice. The early church thrived on this principle initially but because of human weakness and selfishness she began to forget it and then had to institute disciplines to compensate for it.

In the early church those who transgressed against their fellows were obligated to make public confession and then do penance. With the increases in Christendom and the coming of persecutions rules and regulations regarding penance changed and



differences arose in the eastern and western part of the church. Confession, as time slipped on, was gradually changed and for a considerable time books called "penitentials" were the guides. In the "penitentials" penance was emphasized as was the principle of contraries. Because of the flagrant differences in them the "penitentials" were denounced. In the twelfth century public confession gave way to private confession yet the system of penance was subservient to the penitent. Later confession became obligatory once a year in the Western church and the need for stricter definitions arose. Penance was divided into four parts namely contrition, confession, satisfaction, and absolution. Distinctions were also made between lesser and "deadly" sins. As definitions reached their height the church relegated God's forgiveness solely to the priests who had the keys of forgiveness. Abuses became numerous and the sale of indulgences caused a complete deterioration of the penitential system.

The Protestant Reformation, pioneered by Martin Luther, saw a drastic change in the sacrament of penance. Penance was no longer considered a sacrament and confession which was voluntary was made to fellow believers who through faith pronounced absolution. This system of mutual confession continued for a few centuries, with periodic revivals of its practice, but eventually it was neglected and a public confession, on days when the Lord's Supper was celebrated, developed.



In the Roman Catholic counter-reformation the sacrament of penance was set down concisely and concretely for time immemorial. The three integral parts were established as contrition, confession and satisfaction, and the system was kept under the close direction of the priesthood. The Roman Catholic confessional although it offers the opportunity to "talk out" or verbalize one's sins is definitely guilt-centered, and further it is administered in a judicial manner, the priest being the judge and the penitent the prisoner. The legalistic demand of confession of every sin in order to obtain forgiveness gives one the impression that the sins are more important than the sinner; the focus seems to be on the act committed and not on the motivation or drive in the individual that caused the action.

Protestants sensing the need of a modified confessional developed what is called pastoral counseling and have made some significant strides and advancements. The process of pastoral counseling involves the creating of an atmosphere of acceptance where the troubled soul, the perplexed, the maladjusted can come for help and where they can grow emotionally and then spiritually. A unique relationship is established between counselor and counselee by warm acceptance and liking for the troubled person and by a sensitive ability to see his world and himself as he sees it. When this unique relationship is established the troubled person will experience and understand facets of himself which previously he had repressed; will be more able to



function successfully; will become more similar to the person his potentialities point to; and will be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately. Although the main source of difficulty in our world arises from human relationships, it is in a human relationship of love and acceptance that man can rid himself of his confining inhibitions and sins and grow emotionally into a person where the forgiveness, purchased by love, becomes meaningful.

It is in this light, then, that we must recognize that the "pastoral counselor" is at the same time true to his calling as one who mediates the forgiveness and love of God through Jesus Christ. Good counseling does not attempt to bring a sense of forgiveness in one overwhelming experience, but it attempts to help the person work out the attitudes that are creating guilt and anxiety. It attempts to help the person remove the blocks within himself which make the acceptance of forgiveness difficult or impossible. Carl Rogers can describe the attitude of the ideal counselor without using a single religious term, but it is essentially the attitude that Christian ministers have always intuitively maintained. Anton Boisen in his book Problems in Religion points up the fact we are emphasizing when he says: "...all psychotherapy thus resolves itself into a matter of confession and forgiveness."

The Protestant minister as a counselor has a decided advantage that has not been explicitly mentioned before, although it is partially implicit in the techniques discussed.



He has the added advantage of giving to his counselees the "good news" or "the gospel". Psychotherapy as discussed in this thesis can, and is, practised in social agencies without any mention of religion, and with very good results. But psychological and emotional re-orientation does not make a whole man. The whole man is one who is not only emotionally stable but also spiritually sound. We see that the minister as a counselor is in a unique position because he can help a counselee, or penitent, through the whole process of emotional adjustment to insight and thence to forgiveness and then he has the privilege of leading him to the One who waits to reveal the reality of true life.

What is this "good news" or as the Greeks call it "euaggelion"? It is the word which sums up the whole of the Christian message. This "euaggelion" when spoken of as the "euaggelion of God" shows to men a God whose being and heart is love. It is love sent to the world by God through His Son Jesus Christ. Christ not only told men what God was like, He showed them the Father and showed them the highest meaning that life can have. He said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10 K.J.V.)

This "good news" of God's love "embodied" to us by Jesus Christ is for all men, without restrictions. But the "good news" is not a human discovery as are the techniques of psychotherapy.



Man never discovers God. God reveals Himself to men. Paul in Galatians says:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11, 12. K.J.V.)

This "euaggelion" is the good news of salvation.

It is the news of that power which wins us forgiveness for past sin, liberation from present sin, strength for the future to conquer sin. It is the good news of victory.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Willian Barclay, A New Testament Wordbook, S.C.M. Press, 1955, p. 46.



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